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Editor

Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
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our contributors

We are pleased to have Amiya Dev, former editor of this journal, with us in this volume. He retired as Vice-Chancellor from Vidyasagar University and continues to write on subjects related to Bangla and Comparative Literature. Dorothy Figueira, Honorary President of International Comparative Literature Association and editor of *Recherche Littéraire / Literary Research* teaches Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia. She was Visiting Faculty in the CAS Programme of the Department in 2011. Jatindra K Nayak teaches at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, and is a renowned translator. He has published with *JJCL* before. Nandini Bhattacharya, who works in the area of cross-cultural relations, teaches at the Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad. Probal Dasgupta, President of Universal Esperanto Association, continues to teach at the Linguistic Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata. Samantak Das teaches at the Department of Comparative Literature and is Joint Coordinator of the Rabindranath Studies Centre, Jadavpur University. Charu Gidwani teaches English at RKT College, Ulhasnagar and is co-founder of the Parso Gidwani Centre of Sindhi Studies.

IS PROTEUS AT BAY? A NEW LOOK AT WORLD LITERATURE*

It was an early October day. The air was brisk and cold. I was walking past Badrinath Temple towards Mana Camp. River Alakananda came on the way: what clear yet fast flow of water! There was a hanging bridge over it, much shorter than the famous Lachmanjhula. The cable stretching to the other shore cut into a huge granite rock. On the smooth face of that rock some words stood carved: you walk up to them and then take a left turn along the upstream river. But what words do you expect on those Himalayan heights where beyond Mana Camp you can climb up to Alakapuri, the abode of Basudhara Fall, Alakananda's source? Some solace signifying bodily mortality and the immortality of soul? No. They are :

When shall we meet again,
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Proof that Shakespeare has absolutely penetrated into the Indian psyche? Incidentally it was these words that were part of boy Tagore's translation exercise. The story here was of course simple. It must have been some British major or captain from the Raj days laying that hanging bridge who had not forgotten his school Shakespeare. Whether or not he was leaving a mark of pride on the highest mountain of the world, Shakespeare was a gift to the colony. And when the colony took stock of what it had appropriated from her masters, Shakespeare must have been counted

* Delivered as the A G Stock Memorial Lecture, University of Rajasthan, 2009.

one — even now, so many years after independence. Perhaps Shakespeare is India's prime instance of world literature beside her own classics.

Yet when in 1972 on the occasion of the hundred years of public theatre on the Bengal board, Jadavpur University's Comparative Literature department took stock of foreign plays in Indian dress produced in Kolkata houses, the French Molière vied with the English Shakespeare. Later it was Ibsen and Chekhov, Sean O'Casey and Arthur Miller and a few others; soon after, Bertolt Brecht, even with a touch of his famous V-Effekt. Should I confess that though a bit marginally, I was involved with perhaps one of the first Indian productions of Brecht, a workshop outcome in English, of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* to an invited audience under Habib Tanvir's direction? As yet no sign of the Greeks! *Oidipous* would have to wait to get Shombhu Mitra dress it up in Bengali, and that too, as he said afterwards, as a companion to Tagore's *Raja (King of the Dark Chamber)*, a piece on darkness. Truly, the world theatre on the Bengal board had a logic of its own. Of course I am proposing this only as a case, not symptomatic of the other Indian boards that surely have had their own logic. 'India' is too facile a site for such *compte rendu*, better avoided. Besides Anglophone India may be a bit misleading, as has been seen on more than one occasion in such coupling as Tagore and Salman Rushdie.

Anyway, my point is not reception as such but what counts as world literature to us. And there I would differ from much of the classroom practice. But before I get to that, let me speak of another item - the novel. Plays are seen, but novels have to be read. I remember Chandu Menon, author of the Malayalam *Indulekha* saying that he wrote it up so that his wife and friends who could not read English and whom he would be retelling whatever English novel he would be reading, could *read* a novel on their own. And I am told that in the early twentieth century leisured ladies in *bhadra* Bengali homes would often itemize 'a book' on their everyday shopping list, a book along with fish and vegetable

so that they could have a pleasurable read after the midday meal. I am not sure if there has been a thorough count of such books ordered by the day, of how many of them were indigenous and how many translations or adaptations from the popular English — the 'pleat read', not 'unread'. 'Trash' might be an easy rationalization. Would for instance the first free Bengali rendering of *Don Quixote* going by the title of *Adbhut Digvijay* (Wondrous Adventure) done in the last quarter of the nineteenth century feature on that list? How indeed does a book qualify for world literature?

Or is world literature, as some scholars would say, not literature as such but merely a category signifying possible and probable literary interrelations or their absence? Before I take this up, let me record the recent scholarly concern with world literature. It seems to be getting rid of its grey-haired taken-for-granted-ness, its benign inconsequentiality, and to be aimed at a kind of rejuvenation. Goethe who had made the initial pronouncement of *Weltliteratur* in 1827 (the exact date by Peter Fickermann's record was 31 January) is being looked up in detail along with the circumstances leading to it and its possible ramifications. For instance, to what extent was it triggered by the Chinese novel he had just read, *Yu Jiao Li* (translated into French as *Les deux cousines* in 1826)? Not Goethe alone, but Marx and Engels too who also had spoken of *Weltliteratur* in *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, analogous to the world-marketable material commodities. David Damrosch has brought out a full-length book called *What Is World Literature?* exhausting all its aspects, a fruit of extensive research. He has a follow-up now, *How To Read World Literature?* that seems to contain a series of exercise vindicating world literature. Damrosch's project itself is proof of the seriousness with which it is taken in certain quarters. In the meantime, I mean between the two Damrosch titles, a collection of essays has come out *Debating World Literature* edited by Christopher Prendergast (London & New York: Verso, 2004) weighing its pros and cons. Prendergast himself has proposed a critique of the facileness with which it may be approached, as

in Pascale Casanova's *La république mondiale des lettres* (1999). On the other hand Franco Moretti endorses it as an anti-nationalist project in which indeed lies its value. Underlying a good deal of this debate is, if not its identity, its proximity to comparative literature.

This is interesting, for Rabindranath Tagore renamed comparative literature *visvasahitya* or world-literature, which however is a little different from Goethe's *Weltliteratur*. About two decades ago I wrote a paper on these two concepts, interpreting Goethe's concept as worldwide and Tagore's as world-worthy (see *Toward the World*, A Collection of Papers at the Third Congress of CCLA and International Symposium, Guiyang, 1990). For Goethe's concept I used the hindsight of Marx and Engels, more in line with history (I guess I also had Lukács' reading of Goethe as a representative of the bourgeois age in mind), for Tagore's my emphasis was on literary aesthetic. It was a lecture he had given in 1907 at the National Council of Education, Bengal on comparative literature, re-christened by him as *visva-sahitya*, his thrust being on the universality of literary works as opposed to rusticity or localism (or even perhaps narrow nationalism though he had not spelt it out). His position on nationalism would soon grow critical winning him a bad name around. His take-off for the lecture was his favourite Maitreyi [and Kātyāyani] episode from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad where Yājñavalkya reminded her :

Navā are putrasya kāmāya putraḥ priyo bhavati /
 ātmanstu kāmāya putraḥ priyo bhavati //
 navā are vittasya kāmāya vittaṃ priyaṃ bhavati /
 ātmanastu kāmāya vittaṃ priyaṃ bhavati //

(Radhakrishnan 1994 : 282)

(O Wife, it is not for the son's own sake that the son is dear,
 it is for ātman's sake that the son is dear;
 it is not for the riches' own sake that the riches are dear,
 it is for ātman's sake that the riches are dear.)

To Tagore all true literature is about universals, about particulars being generalized or *śādhārāṇīkṛta* — else no *rasa* will be produced. He also thinks of literature as the handiwork of the universal man, not of this author or that author, in this language or that language, in this period or that period, but of writers from all countries and all times mason-like engaged in erecting a temple whose final plan is not known to any one. It is ever in the making, and everyone is doing his or her part in consonance with that invisible whole. Thus all literature to him is world-literature. In an article on 'Comparative Literature in India' published as early as 1959 in the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, and reprinted in the Jadavpur University and Horst Erdmann Verlag published *Contribution to Comparative Literature: Germany and India* (1973), Buddhadeva Bose paraphrased the moot part of Tagore's argument in the text of his Bengali lecture:

If we want to understand man as revealed in action, his motivations and his aims, then we must pursue his intentions through the whole of history. To take isolated instances, such as the reign of Akbar or Queen Elizabeth, is merely to satisfy curiosity. He who knows that Akbar and Elizabeth are only pretexts or occasions; that man, throughout the whole of history, is incessantly at work to fulfil his deepest purposes, and to unite himself with the All — it is he, I say, who will strive to see in history not the local and the individual, but the eternal and universal man. His pilgrimage will not end in observing other pilgrims, for he will behold the god whom all pilgrims are seeking.

Likewise, what really claims our attention in World Literature is the way in which the soul of man expresses its joy through the written word and the forms which he chooses to give to his eternal being. Whether he portrays himself as a sick man or a voluntary or an ascetic — the impulse is always the same, and that is his joy in uniting himself with the world. It is in order to realize the truth of this relationship that we must enter the world of letters. It is absurd to think of literature

as artificial; it is a world whose science no individual can ever master; as in the world of matter, its process of creation is perpetual; and yet in the heart of this ever-unfinished creation there is an ideal of stillness and completion. ...

What I am trying to say amounts to this. Just as this earth is not the sum of patches of land belonging to different people, and to know the earth as such is sheer rusticity, so literature is not the mere total of works composed by different hands. Most of us, however, think of literature in which I have called the manner of the rustic. From this narrow provincialism we must free ourselves; we must strive to see the work of each author as a whole, that whole as a part of man's universal creativity, and that universal spirit in its manifestations through World Literature. Now is the time to do so. (Bose 1973 : 88)

This paraphrase I have quoted at length to make home the ideology of world literature that Tagore had. There was a sense of urgency at the end that brought him rather close to Goethe, though without his affiliation to history. Surely a debate on world literature would do well to have Tagore's *visvasahitya* too in focus. I suppose one of the problems the debaters are beset by is that of unity --- that world literature must mean the same to everyone, that it is a canon of all canons. A concomitant problem is naturally of location from where one is looking at it. Now, since the location is varied, there is no reason why there cannot be various world literature-s. Besides, there does not seem to be any reason why it should be fixed for good. True, some tropes have moved from one part of the world to another, but import is only a part of the story. The novel is said to have a western origin, but surely not the narrative. Two years ago Japan celebrated the thousandth year of *The Tale of Genji* with Murasaki Shikibu's name printed everywhere. What would we call it, with its patches of Proust-like inscapes, not intimate journals to be sure? Then again, genres have their varied traditions and defy worldwide uniformity. Some degree of cultural relativism may be in order here. Going by its

English translation, how do we take Orhan Pamuk's *My Name Is Red*? Its chapters are short, but all fifty-nine of them have a pronoun header — fifty-eight times 'I', once 'we two'. Is this all novelty, and that too of a postmodernist kind, as a reviewer here or a reviewer there may like to hint, unsharp possibly of the politics of 'cultural capital'? Is Pamuk by any chance drawing on the tale tradition, though altogether bereft of the frame, so common to that tradition, for the 'I' ['and the one 'we two'] chapters are all chronological? We begin with an 'I am a Corpse' and an 'I, Shekure' at the end brings the rear including a delightful apology from an imaginary mother about an imaginary son called Orhan: 'Above all, don't be taken in by Orhan if he ... For the sake of a delightful and convincing story, there isn't a lie Orhan wouldn't deign to tell.' (Pamuk 2001 : 503) And here comes the pronoun 'you', the reader or the audience implied throughout. So, our 'Orhan' has framed these may 'I's who come back again and again to keep the story going – and quite a story it is which fact no one will deny, not merely in terms of the thrill but of the history of East-West interface as well. The 'I's are not obviously old 'perspectives', rather impersonations of the storyteller's kind who occupies a central place in the novel. The storyteller is part of a coffee house, a nighttime haunt of Istanbul miniaturists and now a target of religious fanatics that are virulently opposed to art. He hangs an image and then enters it: the tale follows. Will it be wide of the mark to be reminded of multi-framed scrolls occasioning ballad-like singing or chanting, say of the Bengal Pata variety?

I have been going on at length about *My Name Is Red*, for it is part of my world literature now, not simply because of the Nobel fame of its author but also because of its form and content, situated not terribly far from me. If you asked me about a much older novel, Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo*, which too I read in translation and felt a 'world' of it, I would give you a different story but no less worthy. Yet another story it would be if it were T. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*. Does it take me

back to Kafka? Mind you, by 'world literature' I do not necessarily mean world classics. Classics are numerous and are ever growing in number and are ever there. A day will come, or has it already come, when they will virtually overthrow us. Yet you check me on Homer: I shall go back again and again to the Olympian assembly in *Iliad* IV where Troy's destruction is hatched by Here and Athene, Zeus giving in no matter how unhappily to wife and daughter, and in *Odyssey* to the amnesia doled out to the splendidly hospitable and good-hearted Phaiakians of fast oars for no fault of theirs — such were the ways of gods to men! My Dante is the wondrous realization that so many have come down to hell and the pride of being the sixth beside Homer-Virgil-Horace-Ovid-Lucan in the first circle's solemn twilight, a cue hanging in the air perhaps for a Baudelaire-like seventh. The Goethe that readily comes to my mind is the master of Mephisto, 'Ein Teil von jener Kraft / Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft.' But you better not give me a test on classics, for I may merely rattle off a catalogue of names, with hardly a trace of their kernel. Indeed one has to have a politics in order to deal with them by excluding many and including a few. Else you will have to cultivate a civilized boredom like Senator Pococurante's in Voltaire's *Candide ou l'Optimisme* who stupefies our much travelled yet green hero from Westphalia by dismissing most of his idols. Homer no less but Milton above all ('...quel grand génie que ce Pococurante! rien ne peut lui plaire'). Or you may have to resort to a battle of the books à la Swift.

How much innocence or catholicity can we grant ourselves? A good part of the tourists to Helsingor today are half in love with Elsinore's prince. But we all know that Shakespeare took time to win over neo-classical audiences, particularly French. It would not be fair to quote Voltaire (who remembers him as a playwright now?). But even as late as 1827, four years after Stendhal's vindication of the English bard beside the French maestro, *Racine et Shakespeare*, and the very year that young Hugo sang his praise in 'Préface' to *Cromwell* in preparation as it were of

the stormy *Hernani*, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres did a huge oil painting typifying the average Gallic taste. It was called 'Homère dieu' or 'L'Apothéose d'Homère', done in the manner of Raphael's 'School of Athens', with Homer seated high at the centre being crowned by Angelor Nike and his two daughters Iliad and Odyssey stationed at his feet, while a whole host of European masters are paying homage to him, ranged in various poses and at various levels, not poets and dramatists alone, philosophers too, grammarians-rhetoricians, sculptors-painters and composers, patriots, statesmen and heroes – forty-one worshippers including the mythical Orpheus and Eros and one unknown figure. Yes, Shakespeare is there, though we have it on Lytton Strachey's authority that he was a second thought on advice from a friend and is only a very thin profile hard to see. One may look up Ingres' original in the Louvre or its image in the net, but one notices that in spite of being all too marginal on the canvas, almost hidden into the frame, William Shakespeare has a place below Dante, to occasion as it were that famous saying of T. S. Eliot's that Dante and Shakespeare have divided the world between them with no place for a third. Isn't that in certain ways a challenge to Ingres' vision? (On the net one may also locate Salvador Dali's devastating version of the 'Apotheosis' done in the war years of 1944/45, the Homer-borne western tradition gone absurd.) Anyway to go back to Strachey's interest in Ingres, he is not only telling us of the persistent French indifference to the English Shakespeare, rooted in her neo-classical taste since transcended, but also of the English indifference as such, certainly till his time and perhaps still not quite transcended, to the French Racine. Now, how are we going to fit this in with our present concern with world literature, I mean this seeming English indifference to Racine? Is world literature conducive to such dogged relativism? Or is Franco Moretti's 'one and unequal' the answer?

Take *Sakuntala*. Rabindranath Tagore once said, 'I am certain the European poet would have brought the curtain down on the play with the king rent with remorse on getting the ring from the

fisherman and realizing the wrong he had done.' But this was only a leading argument to stress Kalidasa's difference. True, the European poet is inclined to tragedy. But the one European poet he was so familiar with would not perhaps have settled for a hanging denouement. Witness *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* (not *The Tempest* though, that he contrasts with *Sakuntala* for its underlying play of power). Twice in Act VII of *Sakuntala* is the word 'fate' invoked, once when Sakuntala realizes that it is her husband that is embracing her son and yet cannot dare believe it, and again when the son asks her who this man is. But this is not fate in the Greek sense of irreversibility. Being a curse uttered by a not unjustly angry sage whose anger however is not blind to mitigation, the play heads towards a happy denouement. The fish has done its job, the divine and semi-divine well-wishers have wakened Dusyanta from his torpor and assured Sakuntala of his remorse, the only cloud casting a shadow over universal happiness, their lack of knowledge as to the why and the how, being removed by Marica's famous metaphor: *chāyā na mūrchatī malopahatapraśade /śuddhe tu darpaṇātale sulabhavākāśa* (Kale (ed.) 1969: VII.33b) [a reflection cannot form while a mirror is grimed with dirt, / but shows up easily the moment the surface is clear]. (Incidentally, to 'udeti purve kusumaṃ tataḥ phalam' (VII.31a) [first comes a flower, then a fruit] can be traced the celebrated 'die Blühte des frühen, die Früchte des späteren Jahres' of Goethe's *Sakuntala*-quatrain). The 'phalam' has obviously more to do with the son on whose recognition by his father hangs the denouement, how diametrically opposed to that other recognition in world literature, that of the patricide married to his mother. I wonder if Freud had ever read or even heard of *Sakuntala*, the obverse of *Oedipous* in way. Tragedy has no telos, but *nataka* does look forward: at the end of *Exodos* the Choregos asks everyone to cognize the peripety and be humble, the *Bharatavakya* wishes everyone happiness but in a given order of things. In Janamejaya's *Sarpasattra*, the ancestral tale related at his request turns out to be the tale of that enormous fratricide by Bharata's descendents, the very Bharata who is hailed as *Sakuntala*'s present and future, the

course turned boon through suffering and remorse. In view of the *Kuruksetra*, would Freud have been tempted to take a close look at Kalidasa's psyche and tell us what had made him recast the simpler and more straightforward Sakuntala-upakhyaṇa of the *Mahabharata*? But we do have an answer in Tagore's reading, as much of *Kumarasambhava* and *Raghuvamśa* as of *Sakuntala*.

II

On the net, I recently read a thoughtful essay on world literature called 'The Value of an Unstable Category' by Michael Chapman of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. An exposition of the 2004 Stockholm conference as well as of the larger debate, it could not possibly be better titled. Not only does it show the dichotomy of world literature as a *concept* and world literature as an *object*, but it also brings out their inner contradictions. He ends by proposing a set of modules for the South African approach to world literature. One sees the pedagogical imperative, not in his modules alone but in a lot of what the others say. Yet, if on the fringe of pedagogy is research, the kind let us say of *The Buried Book* by David Damrosch, digging into how *Gilgamesh* surfaced, then we may not have much to demur. But where lies the 'window' independent of pedagogy? And if world literature is a matter of multiple windows, then how do we go about ours? Damrosch can choose his or his compatriots' favourites from our languages in terms of dissemination and fame and, where necessary, the concomitant history of translation cum reception as the 'Indian' components, though not quite untouched by 'transnational' or 'transcultural' politics, but that is Damrosch's or Damrosch's compatriots' business, not ours – our butting in there may be a bit of Stockholm-ing of the 2004 variety. Indeed on what principles would we determine *our* 'window' on the world? Unless we know that for certain, and certainly would not be an easy affair considering our plurality, then there is the fear of being taken over by what has been called by

someone, the 'global babble'. Then again, given the primacy of translation for most literatures outside ours, and English being perhaps the most coveted language of translation, there might even be a project called 'World Literature (sotto voce) in English' 'in English' being somewhat like the 'iti kuñjarah' of *Mahabharata* fame. What reigns is default.

Now, to have a window on the world we have to have a home where to produce our literature — a great many of them in our case, not just a national one. But we have been producing often with an open window. This is not the place to recount it. If ever the integrated history of Indian literature mooted by Sisir Kumar Das, of which he wrote only three volumes, gets completed, then we will perhaps have an idea of how often we looked out, that is, how often we had a window on the world, no matter of what size and shape. Of course we live in a much wider world today and our window looks far out. But not everything that comes to our view is really registered sending a ripple through our psyche. Much merely passes by. They may be good writing, but what matters to us is not their value as such, but what they may be meaning to us. And there our needs may be changing from time to time and from language to language, though a certain commonality may not be inconceivable. In other words, our world literature is commensurate with the Indian literature of the day. Will it be too much to say that Indian literature too is a bit of a Proteus, not readily graspable? To speak in national terms, as opposed to the world literary in a continuing Goethean vein, is of course out of the question. Again, to confine to canon is belying the living literary practice. Further, to leave out of count the marginal and the peripheral, as well as oratures is being subservient to the self-complacent metropolitan. Besides to fall back upon the glorious past as against the unwieldy present is playing into the hands of the global commissars of culture.

Yet it is one thing to beware our own variability and quite another to grapple with that sea-god out there, the 'old man of

the sea' that keeps changing shape. Going by Menelaos' tale retold in *Odyssey* IV, you have to have his supposed daughter, goddess Eidothea's favour in order that you know how to get hold of him and make him reveal his knowledge. The problem is you cannot invoke her, she will appear on her own; only you will have to persist.

Are we persisting?

A last word: A trope is good, but a trope may also be a little compelling. Besides, when Menelaos relates this to young Telemachos who has come in search of his father's news, gone for so long, he looks too prosperous for all the blood that has been spilt. Now, by no means should our perception of world literature be complacent and hence a source of power. It should renew its lease at regular intervals. For it should not be a mere possession, a piece of glitter, but an inspiration to the literature we are ourselves producing. And potentially, what we are producing is world literature in another's eye. If translation does the needed mediation, as all votaries of *Weltliteratur* from Goethe down to Damrosch would say it has to, then there may not be any qualms about that potentiality. Are we then very far indeed from what Tagore said a hundred years ago about all literature ideally being *visvasahitya*? Isn't he himself world literature worthy of a place beside Goethe? I would like to invoke what one of his successors, an architect of modern Bengali poetry who announced Mallarmé's poetic to be his ideal, said in celebration of Tagore's centenary :

Though major poets have seldom been as plentiful as autumn leaves in Vallombrosa, they are to this very day more numerous than we pretend; and could we but feel less patronizing to our contemporaries, we would no longer equate greatness with antiquity. Yet exceptions continue to prove all rules; and whether or not we agree with Jamini Roy, the foremost painter of Bengal, that his homeland belies what holds good for the rest of the world, we must admit that the few acres of green grass, which seem to him so abnormal, come under the

operation of general principles only because they gave birth to Rabindranath Tagore (Datta 1970: 247).

Not everyone in world literature deserves this rhetoric better.

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REPRESENTATIONS OF THE INDIAN OTHER

India is brought near by lust for gain.
Pliny, *Natural History* 6.26.60-65

The natives of all unknown countries are commonly called Indians.
Maximilian of Transylvania, *De moluccis* (1888: 116)

I. Western Classical Representations

In the Greek epic tradition, the civilized and the barbarian were clearly delineated. Homer defined civilized peoples through their treatment of strangers, as in Odysseus's encounter with the Cyclopes (*The Odyssey*, Bk. 9) and the Laistrygonians (Bk. 10). In the *Lysis* and *The Republic*, Plato further developed the theme that individuals were deemed civilized only as members of a social group; identity was tied to life within a community or *pólis*. One achieved status only as a citizen of the legitimate Greco-Roman order. Outside this order dwelled the *bárbaros*. The barbarian was distinguished by a lack of an ordered urban or rural existence, an inability to manufacture and employ the material artifacts of more advanced civilizations, and the absence of a sophisticated spoken and written literary culture (Jones 1971: 376). The boundaries of the civilized Greco-Roman world and the dwelling place of the barbarian shifted as geographical knowledge of the world expanded. The more the world was explored and charted, the more distant the barbarian's locale.

Herodotus (ca. 484-425 B.C.) initiated the study of comparative culture by posing two basic questions. He questioned what an alien

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society had in common with his own and how cultures differ from each other. Herodotus defined barbarism in terms of arbitrary power, materialism, tyranny, and cruelty. He equated all foreigners with barbarians. The Scythians, for example, possessed cruel social practices not because of some racial criteria, but rather because of their incapacity to maintain a moral public life capable of ordering human affairs. Herodotus focused primarily on the political aspects of alterity. He maintained that the East could not coexist with the Hellenic West, because it represented all that ran counter to Greek values of order and freedom. Thus, the *Histories* offered tales of cannibalism, lust, and bestiality. However, they also provided extensive data regarding peoples' skull size, color of hair and skin. In this manner, Herodotus both linked civilization to membership in the *pólis* and highlighted racial and moral markers of barbarism in his descriptions of monstrosity.

Herodotus's depiction of India is particularly noteworthy in that he was the only classical author writing on India whose work has survived. All other western classical works dealing with India based on personal knowledge exist only in citation by later authors. Herodotus gives us a fairly extensive description of India. Situated the farthest to the East in Asia (3.98), India possessed the largest population on earth (3.97). Its wealth came from the gold that its natives ingeniously collected from gold-digging ants (3.106). These inhabitants are black, like Ethiopians (3.100). Herodotus distinguished between the fairer settled Aryans of the north and the blacker nomadic barbarians of the south. Significantly, Herodotus's description of the Indian fits into his larger discussion concerning the nomad, epitomized by the Scythians. The Indians appear alongside other nomadic peoples, such as the Persians, Libyans, Egyptians, Massagetae, Budini and Anthropophagae. These populations do not live in fixed dwellings. While these groups differ in certain respects, such as eating habits, sexual mores, and burial customs, they are similar in their lack of agricultural skills. Nomads were cannibals (3.99), as were those Indians who lived on the Persian frontier. Herodotus distinguished Indian nomads from other

Indian settled populations who refrained from killing any living creature for sustenance (3.100). However, these vegetarians were, in their own way, as monstrous as the cannibalistic nomads. They were depraved, indulging in sex frequently and openly "like cattle" (3.100). Herodotus thus presented Indian barbarism on both a physical and a moral plane, a combination that would prove popular in later literature.

Roughly one hundred years would pass before India was next explored in any Greek literary work. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) differed from Herodotus in that he did not identify populations by color, intellect, or culture. In fact, Aristotle's refusal to distinguish Greek traits from those of Asians and Africans is all the more startling, since he had minutely compared the various different types of animals. As in the case of Herodotus, Aristotle linked one's degree of civilization to the opportunity given or taken to be a virtuous citizen of the *pólis*. The Greek was thus specifically distinguished from the barbarian by governance and learning. The civilized were those who as citizens made choices among themselves in a legal compact. Barbarians were cut off from the world and not bound by any moral restraints. In Aristotle, as in Herodotus, Indians fit this description since they shifted aimlessly, subsisting on grass and raw flesh. They were unable to join the society of the *pólis*, since they were already prisoners of their own private world (*Politics* I.2.1253a). Indians thus ranked among brutish inferior peoples who could and should lawfully be enslaved. It is worth noting that, in their descriptions of India, Herodotus and Aristotle both focused primarily on the political and social order rather than the physical aspects of alterity.

Although from very early on India comprised the undifferentiated East (Lach 1965: I.1.4), it was soon "discovered". Alexander the Great invaded India as far as the Indus River in 326 B.C. Seleucus Nicator, who had accompanied him on the Asian expedition, subsequently crossed the Indus. He allied himself with the Indian power structure by signing a treaty with Sandracottus (Chandragupta) and giving the Mauryan emperor his daughter in marriage. In 303

B.C., he sent Megasthenes as his ambassador to Chandragupta's court (Strabo 15.36) in residence in Pataliputra (Patna). It is Megasthenes who gives us the most complete account of India in Greek letters upon which others would subsequently depend for information regarding its geography, social life, and political institutions. The work of Megasthenes, unfortunately, is lost, as are the other historical accounts of Alexander's expedition. Megasthenes and these other historians are preserved, however, in Strabo (63 B.C.-21 A.D.), Pliny (28-79 A.D.), and Arrian (92?-175 A.D.).

Strabo delineated and sought explanations for racial differences in books 11-16 of his *Geography*. He depicted Indians as tall, slender, and free from disease. Their hair is straighter than the "wooly" hair of the African, because Indian air is more humid than that of Africa. He attributed the Indians' skin color to the effects of the sun. But, even among themselves, Indians varied. In the north, their complexion was like that of the Egyptians, in the south, Indians were very dark, like Ethiopians (Strabo 15.13). Arrian also commented on how Indians' skin color differed from that of black races. In the *Anabasis of Alexander*, we learn that they are blacker than the rest of mankind, with the exception of the Ethiopians.¹ It is important to note that while these descriptions recognized racial difference, they did not exhibit any racial animus. In addition to tying racial difference to climate, these authors also offered descriptions of India's crops, natural resources, spices, elephants, monkeys and snakes. Megasthenes commented particularly on the customs and everyday life of the court at Pataliputra. We learn of the jewels, diet and traits of the people. Indians of the Gupta period are seen as living moderate, happy, simple and frugal lives. They are particularly honest and trusting in their demeanor (Strabo 15.20, 22, 53).

Megasthenes paid special attention to Indian social structure. He enumerated with considerable precision the various castes. The highest and the least numerous of the seven classes he catalogued were the philosophers (Strabo 15.39-53). He described in depth how they congregate in enclosed groves before the city and lead

frugal lives. Indian philosophers rest on straw mattresses and skins; they abstain from animal food and the delights of love, yet communicate with anyone who wishes to hear them. These brahmins converse more about death than anything else. They believe that life is like that of a child in the womb and that death, for those who have devoted themselves to philosophy, provides the real birth into true life. They, therefore, discipline themselves to be ready at all times for death.

Megasthenes also described other Indian classes, such as farmers, herdsmen, hunters, and traders. He offered information regarding the duties of each caste and how the Indian social system functioned. One cannot, for example, marry outside of one's caste (Strabo 15.49). Mauryan India possessed an aristocratic form of government with a large state apparatus (Strabo 15.53). Megasthenes described a very elaborate civic structure of thirty separate branches of government, their various departments, and their myriad responsibilities (Strabo 15.51). He also estimated the strength of Chandragupta's forces. It was, however, Indian religious beliefs that particularly interested him. Like Plato, Megasthenes noted that Indians believed in the immortality of the soul. In fact, Strabo claimed that their ideas regarding the soul were quite similar to those of the Greeks (Strabo 15.59) and that Indian philosophy resembled that of Pythagoras (Strabo 15.65).

The figure of the Indian philosopher would become a fairly common trope in classical literature. Philo (20 B.C.-50 A.D.) spoke of the gymnosophists, holy men who held to an ethical and natural philosophy and were living examples of righteous and good heathens (9.62-66). Clement of Rome (d. 97 A.D.) wrote how brahmins were virtuous and lived in peace. In India, there was no murder, adultery, or drunkenness. Indians were god-fearing people. In the *Life of Alexander* (8.65), Plutarch (ca. 46-20 A.D.) commented on the asceticism of the brahmins, as did Philostratus (ca. 172-250 A.D.) in his *Life of Apollonius* (3.15-16). Porphyry (234-305 A.D.) spoke of the continence of the Indian wise men (*On Abstinence* 4). Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 A.D.) emphasized the courage

and spirituality of the Indians Alexander encountered and contrasted the abstemious habits of brahmins with the indulgent behaviour of Buddhist monks and nuns (*Stromateis* 4.7 : 3.194). Strabo had also distinguished Hindu religious training from Buddhist practices (Strabo 15.60). Clement drew parallels between Plotinus and Indian philosophy, as understood from the *Philosophoumenos* (ca. 230 A.D.) of Hippolytus.²

While the Greek travel accounts were quite specific regarding religious practices and civil organization, one theme, in particular, overshadowed all others in these narratives — the presence of fabulous races. India is uniformly described as existing beyond the borders of civilization and stamped as a land of marvels. Scylax (fifth and sixth century B.C.) was the first to note that India was populated with many monstrous peoples. He specifically mentioned the existence of cannibals and sciopods³ (Lach 1965: 1.1.6). The *Indica* of Ktesias of Knidus (400 B.C.) was the first and only full monograph devoted to India before Alexander's expedition.⁴ In it, Ktesias claimed that India was inhabited by pygmies, sciopods, cynocephali, blemnai,⁵ and giants. While the *Indica* purported to be an ethnographic, zoological, and geographic report, it was more of a teratology. The Indian monsters described by Ktesias would subsequently reappear in Pliny (7.2, 14-22), Strabo (15.37, 56), Solinus (52), Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius* 3.47), Aulus Gellius (9.4), and Isidore (*Orig.* 11.3). Pliny specifically speaks of cannibals (16.c. 17), satyrs, tailed men, sea-monsters (8.c.8), and people who are all cars in the literal sense (7.c.2).⁶ This proliferation of Indian monsters in classical sources did not go unnoticed. Although he himself described them, Strabo found grievous fault with their frequent appearance in other works. In fact, he accused the Greek authors of mendaciously spinning tales of Indian monsters and argued that these lying historians had created them as figments of their imagination. While criticizing all the writers who mentioned Indian monsters (Strabo 15.57), Strabo singled out Megasthenes particularly for attack, ranking him on a par with Ktesias. He directly challenged Megasthenes's credibility⁷ and warned his readers not

to take seriously such "incredible" accounts (6.21.3). We find a situation where Megasthenes could both be profusely cited as well as dismissed, especially when specific accounts (such as the stories about Herakles's and Dionysus's Indian adventures) were found particularly implausible. The Greek placement of monsters in India, however, was a significant event, not only for the credibility of the texts in question, but, more importantly, for all subsequent emplotments of India. It is also noteworthy that key classical authors, such as Pliny and Strabo, did not accept uncritically the existence of Indian monsters. Moreover, the Greeks were not unique in their vision of monsters inhabiting the Indian subcontinent. Long before the Greeks had even visited the court of Chandragupta, Indians themselves had developed a fairly comprehensive system for distinguishing themselves from what they deemed to be their barbarian and monstrous other.

II. Indian Representations

Both religious and secular Sanskrit literature shows that the Aryans had created an *imaginaire* of the non-Aryan, transforming linguistic divergence in racial difference. As early as the *R̥g Veda*, the Indo-Aryan speakers had clearly differentiated themselves from the indigenous tribes they encountered in their migrations across the subcontinent. The Aryans depicted the physical traits of these tribes as hideous. Gradually, all those who did not confirm to Brahmanism would become enveloped into an Aryan notion of the barbarian.

The earliest distinction between the Aryan and its other dates from Vedic times. Aryans distinguished themselves from non-Aryans both linguistically and racially. The outsider was the *mleccha* (believed to stem from the verb *MLICH* "to speak indistinctly"). Like the Greek term *bárbaros*, the Sanskrit term *mleccha* onomatopoeitically imitates an alien tongue (Thapar 1978a: 154). It has the additional meaning of "impure". In post-Vedic times, *mleccha* came to refer to non-Sanskrit speaking people, outcastes, foreigners, low castes, and tribals.⁸ The *R̥g Veda* did not speak

of the *mleccha*, but rather the *Dāsa* or *Dasyu*, enemies of the Aryan-speakers who were regarded as alien, barbaric (Thapar 1978a: 154), snubbed-nosed (*anās*), black-skinned (*kṛṣṇa-tvac*), and foreign speakers. *Anās* combines both racial and linguistic sense of otherness in that it can be translated either as *an* + *ās* “without speech” or *a* + *nās*, without a nose or snub-nosed. The term, therefore, either denotes the barbarian or people deemed racially distinct from the Aryans.

Hans Hock has enumerated the following Vedic passages with a racialist interpretation of Aryan descriptions of non-Aryans. He cites, in particular, the work of earlier Sanskritists (Geldner 1951 and Grassman 1872), whose racial interpretations have been echoed by followers of *Hindutva* (syndicated Hindu-based nationalism) that was first promulgated in the 1920’s by V.D. Savarkar and more recently disseminated by Hindu fundamentalist parties. Hock cites the following passages (Hock 1999: 150-55)

sanat kṣetram sakhibhiḥ śvītryebhiḥ (*R̥g Veda* 1.100.18c)
May he win the land with white / light friends.

Āryam prāvad ... svarmīlheṣu... /
...tvacam kṛṣṇām arandhayat (*R̥g Veda* 1.130.8)
Indra helps the Aryan in the battle for the sunlight...
He made the black skin subject...

Pañcāśat kṛṣṇā ni vapah sahasra
Ātkam na puro jarimā vi dardah (*R̥g Veda* 4.16.13cd)
Fifty thousand Blacks you defeated.
You slit up the forts like age [slits up] a garment.

Antah kṛṣṇam aruṣaur dhamabir gāt (*R̥g Veda* 3.31.21b)
He excluded the Blacks with the fiery beings.

Ghnantah kṛṣṇām apa tvacam... (*R̥g Veda* 9.41.1c)
Drawing away the black skin...

'va vitrahendrah kṣṇayoniḥ

Pumudaro dāsir airayad vi (*R̥g Veda* 2.2.07ac)

The killer of Vṛtra, India, broke open the forts
which protected the Blacks in their wombs.

yah kṣṇagarbhā nirahann (*R̥g Veda* 1.101.1b)

Who made the ones who were pregnant with the Blacks abort.

Hock claims that, while these verses seem to refer to the enemies of the Aryans in terms of skin color, there can be an alternative reading. The Aryans are often associated with “whiteness”, “light”, or “brightness”. He cites numerous references to the Aryan world as “light” or “broad” (*R̥g Veda* 1.86.10; 1.117.21; 2.11.4cd; 2.11.18; 1.11.227.14; 3.34.9; 3.39.2; etc.) As a consequence, their enemies could be associated with “darkness” or the realm bereft of light. Such an interpretation supports the reading that it is not the enemies themselves that are “dark”, but rather that they live in a dark world. Hock then cites numerous references in the *R̥g Veda* where the enemies of the Aryans are described as living in “darkness” (1.86.10; 4.51.3cd; 4.51.9c; 5.32.43).

Hock makes a similarly non-racial reading of the term *nvac*. Rather than its customary meaning as “skin”, he notes that it can also connote “the surface of the earth”, as it does in *R̥g Veda* 1.79.3; 1.145.5; and 10.68.4. Likewise, rather than reading *anās* racially as “snubbed-nosed”, he interprets it in a non-racial manner. While *anās* can be read as *a+nās* (without a nose), it can alternately be broken down into *an+ās* and thus mean “mouthless” or a “speechless barbarian”. Rather than translating the verse: “anaso dasyumr amno vadhena / ni duryona avnan mrdhravacah” (*R̥g Veda* 3.39.10cd) as “You destroyed the noseless Dasyus with your weapon; you smashed those of evil speech in their abodes” Hock claims that *anās* should just refer to the Dasyus as non-Sanskrit speaking foreigners. Hock’s non-racialist reading of the *R̥g Veda* passages, while reasonable, is not utterly conclusive, especially in light of those references to the Dāsas as “bull-lipped”. This adjective is

taken by translators to refer to racial differences and does not lend itself to a facile alternative reading. So, as Hock notes, it is anyone's guess what the following verse wishes to connote :

dāsasya cid vṛṣaṣīprasya māyā jaghnathur narā pṛtanājyeṣu
(*Rg Veda* 7.99.4cd)

'You have destroyed the tricks even of the daśa bull-lipped
in the battles, O lords.'

Hock makes the case that the *Rg Veda* did not view their non-Aryan enemies in terms of racial difference. Rather, he asserts that notions of race are modern, more an invention of nineteenth and twentieth century colonialism and imperialism (1999: 155) and, as such, the preferred reading of German Indologists in the past and followers of *Hindutva* ideology in the present.

Even if, as Hock claims, the case for racial distinctions might be problematic in the *Rg Veda*, a vision of physical alterity certainly appears in the later epic tradition, where brahmanical India is presented as surrounded by many races, some real and some intermediary beings, that inhabit the space between demons and humans. Hindu mythology is full of such characters, with Rākṣasas and the Piśāchas among the most prominent. The plot of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, one of the two Sanskrit epics, deals with Lord Rāma's triumph over Rāvaṇa, the king of the Rākṣasas. This epic has been interpreted as a poetic version of the conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism in southern India (Talboys Wheeler 1869: 316). It has also been read as an allegory for the spread of Sanskritic culture into new areas (Thapar 1978b: 22). The epic can be read as a symbolic confrontation of caste versus tribe, the assimilation by Vaishnavism of animistic cults, the formation of a new kingdom from tribal territory and, at the base of all this, the migrations of peoples and the stabilizing of settlements (Thapar 1978b: 28). In broad terms, the epic can even be viewed as an exaggerated form of the history of the Aryan invasion into the vast and then unknown continent of India (Vaidya 1973: 62). It articulates the universal sovereignty that the Aryans arrogated to themselves in their conscious sense of superiority over the aboriginal races of India (Vaidya 1973: 124). In this script, the monsters (*rākṣasas*) are associated with the dark-skinned Dravidians of southern

India because they are often referred to in the epic in terms of the dark complexions as opposed to the fair Aryans. Epithets used in connection with the *rakṣasas*, such as *nīlanjanacayopama* (like the black-bodied mass of people) have on occasion been used by northern Indians to describe Dravidians. One can argue that in brahmanical India a vision of the abject subhumanity of the barbarian finds its legitimacy in this epic representation of the other.

In general, Indo-Aryan-speaking nomadic pastoralists in northern India regarded the indigenous populations as barbarians (Thapar 1978a: 152). The second half of the first millennium B.C. saw an extensive urbanization of the Ganges valley with Aryan speakers assuming the role of the technologically advanced civilization regarding with contempt the forest tribes who were still food gatherers and hunters (Thapar 1978a: 159). This Aryan migration is represented in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where the distinction is drawn between the civilized urban culture of Ayodhya standing in contrast to the barbarian hunting and food-gathering enemies of Rāma, the *rakṣasas* (Thapar 1978a: 159). Elsewhere in the mythological literature, similar delineations between civilization and barbarism are made. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1. 13), for example, mentions the Nisada, a non-Aryan tribe described as black, dwarfed, flat-featured, with blood-shot eyes. The *Mahābhārata* describes the Kirāta, non-Aryan tribe in the jungles of Megadha, as savage omnivores covered in animal skins (*Kaṣa Parva* V.9). The Pulinda are described as dwarves who live in caves and are black like burnt tree trunks (*Bhishakula Śloka Samagraha* 8.31; *Nāṛyaśāstra* 21.89). In all these Sanskrit texts, the *mleccha* are described as monstrous; no self-respecting Aryan should dare approach them (Thapar 1978a: 180-181). In other words, generic barbarian tribes, such as the Pulinda and the Shabara, described by Ptolemy as *agriphāgoi* or eaters of wild things (1.1.64), fit the description of the Pishāca, whom the Sanskrit texts claim eat raw flesh.

There is, in fact, a marked similarity in the descriptions of Indian monsters found in both western classical literature and in Sanskrit texts. This coincidence led Wittkower to claim that Indian monsters were not entirely arbitrary inventions, but had their origins

in the garbled transmissions of stories from Indian mythology (Wittkower 1942: 159ff). Wittkower here merely developed a thesis that classicists had introduced decades earlier. McCrindle had shown that Ktesias's monsters had their counterparts in the Sanskrit literature (McCrindle 2000) and Schwanbeck directly tied Aryan conceptions of the non-Aryan to the portrayal of India in Megasthenes. Specifically, Schwanbeck argued that the Greek historians' emphasis on monsters directly reflected Indian notions of barbarism. He claimed that, while consolidating power, the Aryans responded forcefully to the cultural, racial, and religious differences of the indigenous tribes that they encountered and gave this response a pointed expression (McCrindle 2000: 21). The Aryans not only viewed non-Aryan Indians as barbarians, but also saw them as inferior, even subhuman. The Aryans also identified groups that did not follow brahmanical ritual as barbarian, hideous, and monstrous. This racial ideology, held by brahmin Aryans and reflected in brahmin reports and Sanskrit literary representations, filtered down to the Greeks, just as the animal fables found their way to the Greeks, even before the name of India was known to them (McCrindle 2000: 23). Thus, the Greeks received Indian images of the monstrous other from their brahmin informants, whose learning, as bearers of the Indian philosophy, they held in high regard. These brahmins were the authorities whose wisdom was sought by classical authors, especially in those matters for which they had no firsthand knowledge (Schwanbeck 1846: 74). Schwanbeck examined the monsters of Megasthenes (found in Strabo 711; Pliny 72.14-22; Solinus 59) and showed that their descriptions and even their names were clear transcriptions or transliterations of common Sanskrit terms applied by Aryans to groups over which they sought dominance (Schwanbeck 1846: 74).

According to this argument, the descriptions of Indian monsters found in Greek classical sources derive from and elaborate upon derogatory terms that in the *Rg Veda* could be read and in epic literature was used by Aryan Indians to describe non-Aryans and low-caste populations. As noted, many of these terms are direct translations of the Sanskrit terms; *pamphagos* is the Greek equivalent

of *sarvabhakṣa* and the *viśvabhōjana*. They are also the Sanskrit equivalent of the *amukheters* or people without nostrils who eat everything (Schwanbeck 1846: 69). The cannibal can be seen to derive from Sanskrit terms denoting anthropophagy (*mansabhakṣa*, *amasaṁ*, *piṣitāśin*, *kravyād*). Monsters described as having ears that extend down to the ground derive from the Sanskrit insult for indigenous tribes as *mahākarna*, denoting long or big eared individuals. The monster whose ear extends over his head so that he can sleep under its umbrella, also has a Sanskrit equivalent insult of *karnapravaraṇa*, "one whose ear bends forward."¹⁰ Sanskrit insults such as *uṣṭrakarṇās* (camel-eared), *oṣṭhakarṇa* (lips close to ears), *pamkarna* (having hands for ears) are easily translated into monstrous traits (Schwanbeck 1846: 66). Those monsters depicted with their heels in front and toes pointing backwards are the *Praśūlapulayas*, described in Megasthenes as the *opisthodaktuloi*. The people insulted as *ekapadas* (having one foot) are directly translated in Greek as *okupédes* (Schwanbeck 1846: 68). The cyclops, etc., of course, the people whose eyes are close together and are derided by Sanskrit speakers as one-eyed (*ekākṣā* or *lūlūkṣa*) (Schwanbeck 1846: 70).

The significance of Schwanbeck's thesis cannot be over-stressed. It problematizes one of the key premises of colonial discourse analysis, based as it is on the orientalist project. It calls into question the essentializing vision of a monolithically negative western construction of the eastern other created solely out of a western desire to subjugate the East. Significantly, it suggests a cross-fertilization of racist notions at the source of the western classical literary tradition. It highlights the fact that no one group holds the monopoly on racialist thinking. Although the Greeks elaborated stories of Indian monsters that inform an attitude with regard to India that may have influenced western imperialistic ventures in modern times, they did not necessarily invent these stories. Rather, they heard and adopted terms of derision used by Aryans to describe non-Aryan and indigenous populations they held in contempt. The Greeks translated these derogatory terms and applied them literally. The classical image of the Indian monster that would influence

subsequent encounters in the age of discovery (and beyond) is thus not purely a western racist construct, but found its initial inspiration in Aryan ideology with regard to the non-Aryan other. The West, it seems, does not always set the standards for racist abuse. Moreover, the radical alterity of the other in India is shown to be ideological at its Sanskritic source.

III. Biblical, Patristic, and Medieval Representations

We have noted that the existence of Indian monsters and fabulous races had been called into question by certain classical commentators, as evidenced by Strabo's invective against Megasthenes. Even so, Indian monsters remained in the western *imaginaire*. As India became more extensively explored over time and reliable eye-witnesses never seemed to encounter the physically monstrous creatures described in the classical literature, another form of monster, the ethically deficient Indian, appeared on the scene to assume its symbolic role. It was this form of monstrosity that would inform western medieval and renaissance interactions with India. Since the Bible had tied race directly to civility, it was possible to transform the absent physical monsters into moral monsters.

According to the Old Testament, the earth was divided among Noah's sons with Japhet's descendants populating Europe, Shem's sons peopling the region of the Indian Ocean, Chaldea and Armenia, and Ham's descendants inhabiting Egypt, Libya and Africa. Ham's exile to the far reaches of the earth was in punishment for having been the only one of Noah's sons to have gazed upon his drunken father's nakedness. Ham's descendants were cursed or viewed as descendants of the cursed (i.e. Cain). By relegating Ham to Africa, the Old Testament associated sin with racial difference. Noah's curse of perpetual servitude on the offspring of Canaan, the son of Ham (Genesis ix, 25), condemned Africans who were thought to be his descendants. India, often viewed as interchange with Ethiopia, was thus relegated to a site where Old Testament genealogy had racially embodied sin. Because sin was geographically configured, the biblical rendition of human descent coexisted nicely

with the Greek belief that civilization was tied to the body's relationship to the community (Hanneford 1996: 88). Physical alterity could be associated with moral difference.

In the course of time, the classical and biblical conceptions of what it meant to be civilized were absorbed into the ecclesiastical Christian order. In the Pauline letters, the ethnic other was no longer a non-Greek barbarian but the heathen who did not share in the body of the faithful in Christ. There was, thus, another way of reading monsters — through a Christian schema of salvation that differentiated them from the monsters of antiquity. Monsters now were created, had souls, were rational, and could possibly be converted. They were objects of divine solicitude, capable of receiving Christ's message. After all, some far away places, such as Ethiopia and India, were even thought to be Christian. Eusebius (ca. 263-339 A.D.) claimed that there was a sizeable Christian community in India and St. Jerome (344?-420 A.D.) spoke of the universality of Christianity, using India as his prime example (*Epistola* 60.4). Those who were considered citizens were perceived as such, not by virtue of their membership in the *pólis*, but as willing partners in the Christian community.

Eusebius's and Jerome's attitudes stood in sharp contrast to those of other Church fathers, such as Tertullian (ca. 160-220 A.D.), St. Hippolytus (ca. 170-236 A.D.), and Prudentius (ca. 348-410 A.D.) who each identified Indians as heretics. However, by the time Augustine (354-430 A.D.) wrote *De civitate Dei*, a new political context had presented itself. The Goths had sacked Rome a few years earlier and barbarians, who had been situated at the edges of civilization, now occupied the epicenter of politics. They were much more to be feared than distant monsters. Although Augustine avoided a racialist argument, claiming that the "deserts of sons are not to be estimated by the qualities of bodies" (11.23), he nevertheless devoted an entire chapter to the existence of fabulous races. If monstrous races existed and were human, then they must have been descended from Adam. If they descended from Adam, Augustine maintained that we have no right to pass judgment on them (8.16). In doing so, Augustine challenged the orthodox interpretation

of the division of mankind, claiming that the only categorization that counted concerned those who lived according to God and those who lived according to man. It did not matter if one was speech-gifted or mute, barbarian or civilized, black or white (16.8). It only mattered if one was a willing partner in the sacrament that brought membership in the mystical body of the faithful in Christ.

Augustine also claimed that marvels derived from extreme cases of natural phenomena. As such, they were part of the divine and natural order (Le Goff 1980: 195). Just as there are monstrous individuals in separate races, so in the whole of mankind there are monsters, such as sciopods, hermaphrodites, cynocephali, cyclops, blemnyaes, and pygmies (Augustine 16). As descendants of Adam (Augustine 21.8), the monstrous races provide a divine omen. Augustine explained that their existence revealed God's higher purpose: they offered material proof of God's plan and allowed us to contemplate the glorious superabundance of His creation. Monsters were prodigies; they were placed on earth as an indication of God's power to create all things. Since they were related to the sons of Noah, they were redeemable. God had placed monsters on earth to participate in the Last Judgment at which time His power to refashion the bodies of the dead would be Faith's witness. The monsters signified God's power, wisdom, and presence in all creation. They were thus metaphoric illustrations of God's inscrutable yet wondrous plan of making meaning known.¹¹ The monster did not stand as something against nature but rather challenged the concept of nature as it was understood.

Classical Greek accounts of the monstrous now had to be treated with circumspection. Whatever physical form they took, all men born of Adam were rational and mortal. Medieval representations supported this new attitude. Through the allegorization and moralization of marvels, Indian extravagances were given new meaning and stripped of their scandalous quality. In this manner, the dog-headed men reverted to querulous people and monsters could again become judgmental representations of ordinary mankind. Throughout a process of domestication, mystical allegories also became transformed into moral allegories (Le Goff 1980: 195). In

the central interior portal of the cathedral church of St. Magdalen in Vézelay, cynocephali are placed beside non-monstrous men receiving the teaching of Christ (Lach 1965: 1.1.30). The diverse human nations (especially the marvelous peoples of India) stand beside Christ and the Apostles and await conversion.

Early map makers also struggled with the role that monsters would play, given their new religious status. On medieval maps, the monster figures prominently and was articulated spatially. Relegated to remote space, monsters were made inaccessible. They were cut off from Europe by the ocean, mountains, torrid zones, or walls. The book of Revelations (20: 7) had prophesied that horrible barbarians would ravage the world on Judgment Day. They inhabited Gog and Magog at the eastern limits of the world. Subsequent tradition held that they were separated from humanity and prevented from overrunning the Christian world by being enclosed behind a wall constructed by Alexander the Great. India, like Gog and Magog and Alexander's Gate, had no fixed geographical location in medieval cartography. It was simply on the extreme border of Christian sacred geography.

In the western epic tradition, India designated the most remote regions on earth. Ernst Robert Curtius offers five examples from early literature where India is depicted as situated beyond the limits of the Known world (Curtius 1963 [1953], 160-61). In *The Aeneid* (6: 94) Anchises prophesies that Augustus would extend dominion so far that he would rule even over the Indians. Boethius opined that even if as distant a place as India trembles before one's power, it means nothing, if one cannot rule one's own soul (*Consolatio* 1.1). Fortunatus claims that King Chilperic, like St. Martin and St. Hilary, were so well known that their renown extended even as far away as India. In the Old French epic, the *Chronicle of Astolphe and Aymeri de Narbonne*, the Emperor Charles is urged to take such vengeance on Ganelon that men will talk about it even in India. In such texts, India comes to represent both the totality of the world as well as its edge (Uebel 2005: 21).

From the 4th to the 12th century, Indians figure in European literature as simple and upright people who please God and invite

Christian imitation. They become symbols of natural goodness, embodying the possibility of salvation without revelation. The 12th through the 14th century will reproduce this general portrait (Hahn 1978a: 213). In *Theologia Christiana*, Abelard will present Indians as virtuous heathen who are saved. They are proto-Christians: devout and abstinent (Abelard 1969: 1.133). Because of their ignorance of Christianity, Dante also finds them blameless. When Dante revisits the topic of the salvation of just pagans in Limbo (*Paradiso* 19.70-78), he makes an Indian the single representative of all the world's virtuous heathen. The sole exemplum of the salvation of the just, the Indian lives a faultless life and observes God's precepts naturally. He is as good as human reason can determine (*Paradiso* 19.73-74).¹² For Dante, however, India's geographical location was still a bit vague. He situated it at the Eastern limit of the world -- "ag'lspari ed agl'Indi" (*Paradiso* 29.101). India could take on mythic proportions because of its geographical distance from "civilization". It thus provided a convenient locus to denote the East beyond the Moslem realm (Nowell 1954: 113). Although present in the earliest global depictions of the world, the representations of India remained obscure since the *mappae mundi* focused on depicting spiritual geography rather than land masses and oceans (Hahn 1978a: 221).

The eighth-century Beatus Map, for example, showed the dispersion of the disciples to the ends of the earth in order to highlight the Christianization of the globe. This map placed Paradise at India's borders. On other maps, India is positioned at the limits of the world, either on the far right or the top (which, depending on the map-maker, represented the formal East). Early maps often provided pictorial representations of biblical genealogy as in the case of the BOC and V maps which prominently bear the names of Noah's three sons. The Beatus Map also juxtaposed India with the Garden of Eden. The T and O maps and the seventh-century map of Isidore of Seville, the standard reference of Asia, are likewise filled with representations of biblical personages. On these maps, India is usually depicted as converted to Christianity by St. Thomas.

Marvellous depictions abound in the cartographical representations of India.¹¹ The Hereford Map (dating from around 1280) lists twenty races and peoples India with sciopods, pygmies, giants, blemmye, and unicorns. These various Indian "populations" are closely grouped around the easternmost section surrounding the medallion that encloses the Garden of Eden. Although monstrous, the India figures are relatively close to normal in appearance. The Pandians and Gangines (Astomi) differ from Westerners in customs and diet, respectively. The former are described as ruled by women and the latter live entirely on the scent of apples. Indian pygmies and giants are shown to differ from westerners only in size. The monocoli are deformed, but portrayed as harmless. The "humanness" of the Gangines, pygmies, and the Pandian queen is underscored by the fact that their bodies are clothed. The gangines, for example, wear civilian clothing; the pygmies and the Pandian queen carry shields.¹²

Significantly, Indians are distinguished from Africans on the Hereford Map. Although the Nubians are described as "very Christian" (*gens nibeï ethiopes — christianissimi*), they nevertheless are depicted as clearly racially distinct. Africans are portrayed either as deformed by birth (Himantopodes, Marmini, straw-drinkers, hermaphrodites, Amyctyrae, Amberi, Sciopodes, Epiphagi) or monstrous, because of their weird cultural habits (Phylli, Apriophagi, Ethiopian Gangines, Troglodytes). It is their bizarre involvement with serpents, their diet of panthers and lions, and lack of civility within their own race that separates them from Europeans (Blum 2003: 36). Unlike the Indians, Africans are portrayed as naked with prominent sexual organs sometimes accented in red. Whereas Indians have shields, Africans are armed with poles and mallets. As in Herodotus, so too with cartographers: the Scythians received the most extensive and damning descriptions. They are situated at the northern edge of the map. As opposed to the Ethiopians and the Indians, the Scythians are depicted as truly horrific cannibals, and capable of eating the corpses of their parents. Unlike their depiction in Herodotus, the Scythians are clearly distinguished from the Indians on the Hereford Map. They are

truly to be feared whereas the Indians are neither as savage nor ferocious. It is worth noting that the Antichrist dwells in Scythia on this map.

On the thirteenth-century Erbstorf Map, the world is represented by the body of Christ (BOC), with Jerusalem at the navel. This map presents a far more detailed primitive ethnography. It lists, for example, twenty-four races. On its side panels, the exotic physical traits and qualities of the various populations are portrayed, as well as their customs and foods. India figures prominently in these depictions. Both the Erbstorf Map and the London Psalter Map, which date roughly from the same time, place Africa and India at the lower right or extreme edge of the world disk and populate them with monstrous races who are depicted as physically, climatically, geographically, or technologically remote (Friedman 2005: 44). This placement suggests that monstrous excess and moral defect result from climate and geography. On the Erbstorf Map, Gog and Magog appear in upper left, the extreme northeast portion of the Caucasus Mountains in Russia and bordering on the Caspian Sea, where Alexander is depicted as having erected a wall secured with iron and brass gates.

Ptolemy, who had been rediscovered in 1406, explained differences among peoples in terms of climatic, regional, and astrological influences. He believed that the Indian Ocean was enclosed by land. As a consequence, the Walsperger Map (1448), which relied heavily on Ptolemy, connected the Indian Ocean to the ring of ocean that surrounded the world. The Walsperger Map situated the monstrous races not in India or Africa, but at the South Pole. The Fra Mauro Map (1459), which also followed a Ptolemaic conception of the world, delineated the Indian Ocean as landlocked.¹⁵ This map did not depict any monstrous races living in Africa or India. It did identify, however, the existence of dog-headed men, cannibals, and phoenixes as well as the realm of Prester John and earthly paradise. In short, India had become, to cite Jacques Le Goff, a real site for fantasy (Le Goff 1980: 190).

IV. Apocryphal, Romance and Miracle-Letter Tradition

The cartographical representation of Indian monsters not only reflected their new status within God's providential plan, but also the growing significance India had assumed in apocryphal literature and, most notably, in the *Acts of Thomas*, texts dating from the first part of the third century that describe Thomas's missionary activity in India (*Apocryphal New Testament* 1969: 428). *Thomas* relates how, after the crucifixion, the disciples divided the world into missionary regions and the apostle was chosen to go to India. He declined this assignment, making the excuse that he was in bad health and spoke only Hebrew. To force him to go, Jesus had to sell him as a slave to a merchant from India, Habban, who had been sent by his master, King Gundaphorus,¹⁶ to Palestine to secure a skilled carpenter.

Gundaphorus needed someone who could build him a magnificent palace. Thomas was asked to perform this task and readily took the funds that Gundaphorus offered. However, rather than building the palace, he distributed the money to the poor. As a consequence, the future saint was flogged and imprisoned. Gundaphorus's brother, Gad, was so distressed by Thomas's squandering of the funds from the royal treasury that he fell ill and died. On his journey heavenward, Gad spied a magnificent palace and asked to whom it belonged. He was told it was the palace of King Gundaphorus. Upon receiving this revelation, Gad immediately asked permission to return to earth so he could inform his brother of the palace that awaited him in heaven. The request was granted and he returned to life. After he related the story of the miracle to Gundaphorus, both Gad and his brother asked Thomas to baptize them as well as many of their subjects. This apocryphal story of Thomas's career in India would subsequently find its way into the literature of adventures surrounding Alexander the Great. The *Alexander Romance*, as these adventures are generally known, was composed in Alexandria sometime before the fourth century A.D. by an unknown author whom certain manuscripts identify falsely as Callisthenes, a nephew of Aristotle, the companion of Alexander and historian of his expedition to India (c. 325 B.C.). Subsequently,

this collection of stories was attributed to Pseudo-Callisthenes.¹⁷

The third book of Pseudo-Callisthenes describes Alexander's victory over Porus and the ensuing adventures. Alexander receives a letter from some brahmins who want him to understand their world-view. The brahmins believe in detachment from worldly possessions and, as proof of their love for their fellow man, offer Alexander all that they have. They also inform Alexander that they possess a love of learning. Alexander, fascinated by the information reported in this letter decides to visit these brahmins, the half-naked Oxydrakes or gymnosophists. Alexander converses with them and poses a series of questions to which they give clever responses (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1955: 101-02). He questions them about their thoughts on death and they respond that they view the earth as their grave. In short, they respond to his queries with a series of philosophical riddles regarding fate, providence and immortality. Alexander then writes a letter to Aristotle describing his experiences in India (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1955 : 193), including his encounter with the Brahmins. He also informs his teacher about India's wealth of natural resources: gold, silver, and precious gems, and the variety of its exotic wildlife. Alexander tells of encountering marvels, such as talking trees that predict his future death in Indian languages as well as Greek (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1955: 106). He recounts meeting men with six hands (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1955: 105). Forced to battle wild beasts, monsters, and even Darius, Alexander conquers them all. Furthermore, he discovers in India the limits of civilization at the famed Caspian Gates (Pseudo-Callisthenes 1955: 104). It is important to note that here too the Caspian Gates, the site of the biblical Gog and Magog and the absolute limit between the human and the monstrous, are located in India. Pseudo-Callisthenes's depiction of India and its marvels would provide the authoritative description for subsequent authors.¹⁸ In particular, his portrayal of saintly Indian brahmins would reappear in the works of other authors such as his contemporary, St. Ambrose (330?-397 A.D.)

In Ambrose's account, the brahmins claim to wage war only among themselves. They sing hymns to God, live on a diet

of fruit, and look forward to their life beyond this sorrowful existence. They seldom speak or quickly fall silent. These Indians depicted by Ambrose stand in sharp contrast to Alexander and his men who amass gold and silver, need large dwellings, and avidly procure slaves. The Greeks seek honors, run after positions of high rank, eat and drink as much as they can bear, and wear soft luxurious garments (Ambrosius 1962: 21). Indians are superior to these Greeks because their souls are not filled with an avid and unbound desire (Ambrosius 1962: 27). While the Greeks lust after everything, the Indians crave nothing (Ambrosius 1962: 29). They need no gifts, since the earth provides them with sustenance like a mother provides milk for her baby (Ambrosius 1962: 25). Ambrose's brahmins instruct Alexander that if he wishes to learn the truth, he should remain in India, live naked in the wilderness, and renounce all honors and marks of distinction. They are willing to welcome him into their midst (Ambrosius 1962: 47). Alexander's encounter with virtuous brahmins and the description of Indian wealth and marvels would become popular themes subsequently reformulated in a series of spin-off texts in the genre of the miracle letter.

A form of teratological literature, miracle letters described thrilling adventures in distant lands with strange people and weird customs. The miracle letters concerning India were disseminated in two forms. Some letters were embedded in the *Alexander Romance*. They concerned marvellous adventures, such as Alexander's trip through the desert to the sea (the end of the world), his journey to the land of the blessed, his descent to the depths of the ocean, and his ascent into the sky. A number of these adventures were also condensed and disseminated in the form of individual "miracle" letters. As we have noted, the most significant miracle letter regarding India was Alexander's Greek epistle to Aristotle that appeared in book 3 of the Pseudo-Callisthenes. This letter also appeared in Latin as the independent miracle letter entitled the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem* (2nd-3rd centuries A.D.) and was part of a larger epistolary series focusing on the partnership of Alexander and Aristotle.

It is important to understand that none of these letters can be considered as genuine documents or even forgeries. That was not their intended use. In the case of the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, its stated purpose was to inform Aristotle about India, its weather, animals, and inhabitants. What Alexander relates in it, however, is meant to test Aristotle's credulity. To defeat Porus, Alexander must battle snakes and wild beasts encountered in the desert (Gunderson 1980: 28.8-27). There, he meets semi-nude Indians, two-headed beasts, hairy nine-foot tall humans, ichthyophagi, and cynocephali (Gunderson 1980: 27.4-33). He also encounters those prophetic bilingual trees (Gunderson 1980: 37.9-52). After traversing a desert where he is threatened by snakes, panthers, and tigers, Alexander encounters a ten-foot tall black priest with dog-like teeth and people who live three hundred years. In traversing India, Alexander also discovers an abundance of gold and emeralds. On the long march back, he has to battle even more monsters before he finally exits through the Caspian Gates¹⁹ at the entrance to India at Prasiace.²⁰ In this letter, he actually defeats Porus twice (3.13 and 23.8-27), giving the impression of a never-ending confrontation between the Greeks and the Indians and thus between the civilized and the barbarian.

By examining the East from a perspective of Aristotelian biology (Romm 1991: 17) with Alexander as its champion, Western civilization undertakes the task of ordering Indian disorder (Romm 1991: 23). We learn that even our supply of names and categories are not large enough to describe the tremendous diversity encountered there. While seeking water, the Greeks pass the night under attack by swarms of various hostile beasts, beginning with an onslaught of scorpions (Romm 1991: 25). They accumulate vast stores of precious stones gathered from flowing rivers (Romm 1991: 22, 32-33, 34-40) and visit palaces and buildings encrusted with gems (Romm 1991: 47, 57-60, 62-63). They also discover other stones imbued with magical powers (Romm 1991: 29-30, 66). Of all the riches in the world, India's magnificence is seen to surpass everything that is known. The *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, in fact, tests Aristotle's taxonomic categories. The

desire for accumulation itself can be seen as the real subject of the letter (Uebel 2005: 143). India definitively becomes a land of excessive wealth and monstrous beasts. It is this image that will nourish the imaginations of those who eventually venture forth to India. However, the other image of India prevalent in this literature, the philosopher-priest, would prove equally significant.

Around 800, an anonymous author fashioned a series of letters allegedly exchanged between Alexander and the Indian philosophers documenting their moral excellence. Archbishop Leo of Naples (10th century) wrote an offshoot of this collection entitled the *Book of Battles (Historia de preliis)*. There was also a group of letters concerning Alexander's contact with the gymnosophists (*Alexander's Disputation with the Gymnosophists*). These letters are of a Cynic inspiration. They can be read either as contrasting the evil and materialist civilization of the Greeks with the pure and simple lives of Indian sages or as a response to Alexander's Cynic opponents. They later served the purpose of extolling waning Christian orthodoxy. Their intent was to attack the corruption of their target audience.²⁴

Other epistles, notably the *Letter to Aristotle and Olympia* or the *Letter to Olympias*, follow the pattern established in the *Letter from Alexander to Aristotle*. These letters relate how Alexander tried to catch the brahmins with trick questions only to be defeated by their superior wisdom and wit. As a whole, the miracle letters relating to India are all quite repetitive and largely dependent on Pseudo-Callisthenes. They are also derivative of a text attributed to Palladius (c.63? 430 A.D.) of a fictional exchange between Alexander and the ruler and teacher of the brahmins, Dindimus. The work, the *Commonitorium Palladii (Palladius on the Brahmins)*, in addition to describing the Indian marvels, offers an account of Alexander's great conversation with Dindimus, and his assessment of the brahmin ascetic life-style. Here too, the evils of Greek materialism are compared to the virtuous simplicity of brahmin life. The same Cynic spirit, using an ideally spiritual India in contrast to a corrupt Greece, can also be found in another miracle letter,

the *Collatio Alexandri Magni cum Dindimo Rege Bragmanorum de Philosophia per Litteras facta*. Although this particular letter had an anti-ascetic conclusion, readers tended to ignore it in favor of reading the tale of a virtuous pagan who is a good ally to Christians in their struggles against heretics and pagans. We also have the wonder letter of Pharismanes (Permes) to Hadrien (8th century) and the letter of Premo to the Emperor Trajan. The significance of these letters resides in their representation of wise religious figures living virtuous and abstemious lives. In this literature, the Indian appears not as a pagan barbarian, but as something akin to a Christian saint.

All these letters describe the wonders of the East for the benefit of political leaders in the West. But the significance of the epistolary genre, especially in the Middle Ages, was not whether a letter was actually sent but whether it performed its representative function. Its reality as a letter (origin, destination, factual content) was secondary to the purpose of giving an understanding of reality, manipulated by the play between sameness and otherness, presence and absence. Such letters created a space for managing and naturalizing this different reality. They could also be seen as mediating between two realities. In such instances, the letters contrasted the corrupt West with a utopian India inhabited by ascetic philosophers. They created an ersatz encounter between the supposed sender and the supposed addressee, providing one half of a complete dialogue (Uebel 2005: 109). They were read as fiction and non-fiction. As documents, the wonder letters structured the readers' suspension of disbelief and called into question what one knows and what one thinks one knows. They set up a contrast between this world now and another possible world to come. Like the *Alexander Romance*, they fueled the popular imagination by attempting to reconcile the fabulous and the monstrous with an ideological quest for Christian redemption. With the reader situated in the gap between these worlds (Uebel 2005: 103), the stage was set for the subsequent travel literature of the age of a discovery to generate a space for individual transformation.

V. Conclusion

In the Middle Ages, the Indian Ocean²² and the land beyond it were presented as a repository for oneiric projections, a place of dreams, myths, and marvels, inhabited by fantastic men and beasts. India was also depicted as an earthly paradise, where one could experience bizarre carnal enjoyments and encounter saintly brahmins (Hobbes 2003: 15). This conception of India as an ambiguously situated land of fabulous races would continue into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, well after explorers had reached its shores and actual physical encounters with Indian populations had cast the Monster's existence into doubt. However, even new-found knowledge would not force Europeans to relinquish these dreams. Explorers traveled to distant countries with a preconceived idea of what they would find. Since they knew their classical authors, Christian encyclopedias, natural science treatises, romances, maps and miracle letters it is not surprising that the lands they set out to discover would conform to the world previously configured in this literature. The representations of India found in classical sources and the Alexander legend that had been embellished with biblical allegory would thus enter into the subsequent popular literature of Latinity. The India divided into antitheses of the civilized and the barbarian and inhabited with saintly heathens, Christians and monsters, would continue to haunt western consciousness in various forms for many years to come.

Indian Christians, pseudo Christians, and monsters appear as embodiments of time, feeling and place. They incorporate fear, desire and anxiety. They are constructs and projections, existing to be read into the body of the Indian. They beckon from the edges of the world, providing lessons in morality for secular audiences (Cohen 1996: 18). The Indian Christian (whether in the form of real Christians or proto-Christian brahmins) would provide an ideal to be emulated. The Indian Christian would also be an all, upon whom one could rely when western Christian secular and religious powers showed themselves to be weak. Concomitantly, the body of the Indian monster would provide a safe expression in clearly delimited and liminal space for fantasies of aggression

and inversion. The Indian Christian and the monster would both provide escapist delight. However, whatever pleasure one derived from these figures turned to fear when either threatened to overstep boundaries. When successfully contained, however, Indian imaginary Christians and monsters function as our alter egos. By threatening to dissolve the border between the other and the same, they expose the fragility of classificatory boundaries. Both give voice to the fragmented self and demarcate the system of relations we designate as culture. They call attention to the borders that must not be crossed (Cohen 1996: 13). To step outside the official geography is to risk attack or risk becoming other oneself. They ask us, much as does Montaigne's cannibal, to question our cultural assumptions, perceptions of difference, and tolerance towards its expression. They offer the possibility of other social practices and customs that can be explored. The Indian other represented in the literature examined in these pages reside on the interstices between civilization and barbarism, Christianity and paganism, the human and the monstrous. For this reason, they are able to direct us to a more complex understanding of ourselves.

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1. Arrian also described the Indians as tall and slender, lighter in weight than other men. See also Arrian's *Indica* (ca. 150 AD).
2. In this regard, see Filliozat (1945) and Armstrong (1936).
3. People with a large foot that extends over their head like an umbrella.
4. Portions of his account survive in the *Natural History* of Pliny (28-79 A.D.) and the *Indica* of Arrian.
5. People who have no head; their eyes, nose and mouth are embedded on their chest.
6. Pliny's comments on India (*Natural Histories*, bk. 6) were based on Megasthenes's *Indika*.
7. Arrian (*Exped Alex.* V.v), who claimed to have sought out credible accounts of those who accompanied Alexander on his expedition, approved of Megasthenes. Diodorus simply omits

Megasthenes's questionable accounts for the sake of clarity. Strabo and Pliny edited Megasthenes for accuracy. However, in their attempt to make his account a pleasant read, they edited out important information, such as boring lists of topographical data, which were thereby lost.

- 8 The Greeks, whom the Indians called *Yavana*, were certainly *mlecchas*. *Yavana* was a term believed to derive from the geographical term *Ionía*.
- 9 With the boundary of Aryan control in the Ganges valley, any Aryan who entered the *mleccha-desā* (land of the *mleccha*) required elaborate expiatory rites to cleanse themselves of pollution as repeatedly enjoined by the *dharmaśāstras* (law books).
- 10 See also the Sanskrit terms *karnaprāvaraṇā*, *karnikā* and *lambakarnā*.
- 11 Eudore also viewed the monster as "making known". His etymologies presented them as portents (11.3.2), making the future known.
- 12 Elsewhere in the *Divine Comedy*, India is described as a unique site because of its hot climate (*Inferno* 14.32; *Purgatorio* 6.21) and vegetation (*Purgatorio* 32.41).
- 13 As in the Classical period, so too, in the Middle Ages, "India" continued to designate the area encompassing the Indian subcontinent, the East Indies, and the Far East.
- 14 The descriptions of the Indians on this map are largely taken from Solinus (52.20).
- 15 China appears for the first time on the Pira Mauro Map.
- 16 As Messiaev notes (1959: 16), Gundafor was Gondaphares (Gondaphara) who was a 1st century A.D. Partho-Indian king known from coins found in the Indus Valley and thus a contemporary of the Apostle.
- 17 There are many derivatives of Pseudo-Callisthenes in many languages. Julius Valerius produced a Latin version (*Res Gestae Alexandri Macedonis*) in the early fourth century to be followed by vernacular renditions in German, Provençal, French, Dutch, English, Arabic, Syriac, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Hebrew and Ethiopic. There was also a Jewish Alexander tradition involving the enclosing of Gog and Magog, his visit to Jerusalem and the Lost Tribes of Israel. Finally, there were historical Alexander texts, such as the *Res Gestae Alexandri* *Magni* of Orosius, Curtius Rufus, the *Anabasis* of Arrian, the

Bibliotheca of Diodorus Siculus, and the *Life of Alexander* of Plutarch.

18. There exists the testimony of Alexander's secretary Eumenes and Ptolemy's eyewitness account. Both renditions survive in excerpts in Cleitarchus and Megasthenes and these, in turn, were reinterpreted by Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and Arrian. It is, indeed, ironic that the image of India and its brahmin inhabitants found in Pseudo-Callisthenes became the authoritative "first-hand" account in contrast to the narratives of those who actually had travelled with Alexander on his expedition and left behind day-to-day accounts.
19. Elsewhere the Caspian Gates are situated at Gog and Magog.
20. From the Sanskrit meaning eastern, so the Prasioi are easterners.
21. In this regard, they form a parallel function to the trope of the Germans found in Tacitus and the French Enlightenment depiction of the noble savage.
22. Until the late fifteenth century, the Indian Ocean was understood as an enclosed sea, the *mare clausum* (Le Goff 1980: 189-200).

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REVIEWING THE WEST : A PERSPECTIVE ON ODIYA GYANAKOSHA OR ENCYCLOPAEDIA ORISSANA

Before independence, during the anti-colonial freedom struggle, encyclopaedia writing was widely viewed as part of the initiative of nation building. In fact, encyclopedias came to be seen as status symbol by the members of the emergent middle class in India and several attempts were made to compile encyclopaedias in different Indian languages before 1947. The attitude of the emergent Indian middle classes to encyclopaedia-writing has been perceptively defined by H. Venkatachalapathy. He says:

A standard response of the colonial Indian middle class to Western knowledge has been a sense of 'inadequacies' and lack of history, of biography and autobiography, of prose, of the novel and so forth. The absence of the encyclopaedia — that spectacular monument to the Enlightenment, an unending source of neutral and rational knowledge — in Indian languages was one such perceived lack. (Venkatachalapathy: 1968:200)

Nationalists also held colonial rule responsible for the absence of encyclopaedia in Indian languages. The observation of Binode Banerjee, a participant in the anti-colonial freedom struggle, a scholar and an encyclopaedist, expresses this attitude. In any entry on encyclopaedia in the 18th volume of Gyanamandala (The Circle of Knowledge) Banerjee writes :

During the period in which encyclopaedias were written in all developed nations, of the world, India was a colony. The

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British showed no interest in getting encyclopaedias compiled in India nor did they encourage those who made a feeble attempt in this direction. Over the years, English-educated Indians came to convince themselves that no Indian language was capable of communicating scientific theories and thought. They also came to believe that Indian languages were not capable of expressing thought related to non-scientific subjects like economics and sociology. (Kanungo 1987:24)

Nagendra Nath Basu's 22-volume *Viswa Kosha* in Bengali published in 1911 is a famous response to this perceived lack, and Basu's example was emulated by encyclopaedists in several other Indian languages. The publication of *Viswa Kosha* led Gopabandhu Das, an eminent literary and political figure in Orissa, to say in 1918 : 'We have seen that an encyclopaedia has been published in Bengal. But can we dream of something like this taking place in Orissa in near future?' (Cited in Kanungo, 24). The Hindi translation of the *Viswa Kosha* in 25 volumes was published in 1926-1932.

At least four encyclopedias in Oriya came to be published before 1947. All these, while seeking to cater to the growing demand for 'neutral and rational' knowledge from educated members of the new middle classes, also sought to consolidate a sense of identity and in some instances shaped a subtle critique of colonial rule.

This anti-colonial agenda was visible in the entries on western nations in some of these encyclopaedias. In Lala Nagendra Kumar Ray's *Bibidha Ratna Sangraha*, published in 1936, the year in which Orissa was granted the status of a separate province by the British, entries on Britain emphasized its irresponsible hedonism, its unethical practices and held it responsible for many ills afflicting India. The encyclopaedist informs his readers that 160 crore rupees are spent on cosmetics by the British on tobacco snuff and cigarettes. And that British women spend 80 crore rupees on cosmetics. The British spend 58 crore rupees on watching films, 65 crore on sweets. The readers are informed that there are 200000 sweet shops in Britain (Ray, 184). Later this information is followed by a comparison between the salary of the Viceroy of India with

that received by his native subjects: the former's salary is 2155 times the per capital income of his Indian subject. The compiler, however, does not stop here. He goes on to mention that the USA president's salary is only 12 times that of an American (Ray, 256) The entry on De Valera speaks approvingly of his anti-British activities and goes out of its way to mention his friendship with an Indian leader. (Ray, 149) Entries on other western nations made a point of mentioning the degree to which these were democratic and the situation of the Indian diaspora in Australia and Canada and how it suffered discrimination because India was not a free country. However, considerable care was taken by Ray not to antagonize the British. The critique of the colonial dispensation was presented in the form of apparently neutral information and statistics.

The situation changes after India attains independence in 1947. The anti colonial stance is abandoned and change in the tone adopted towards the west becomes noticeable. The emphasis shifts to the task of building a new nation and a class of educated, well-informed Indians. A new approach to the task of compiling encyclopaedias becomes evident. In this context, what Binode Kanungo says of his decision to write an encyclopedia in Oriya deserves to be quoted at some length :

One thought kept exercising my mind : it would not be right to spend the remainder of my life applying myself to tasks which did not engage my whole being. I must focus on something specific. I must choose a task which would give me satisfaction and translate at least some aspects of Gandhi's vision into reality. After giving the matter thought for a few months I arrived at a decision: Work on khadi, cottage industries, eradication of untouchability had no future although these were dear to Gandhi. I would take up another task which was also dear to him and try to succeed in fulfilling it. This task, in its widest sense, is popular education. (Kanungo, 113)

It is to be noted that, not just idealistic individuals like Kanungo, the government of newly independent India now encourages compilation of encyclopaedias in different Indian languages and some universities take the initiative in this direction. The making of the

ten-volume Tamil encyclopaedia *Kalaikkalhiyam*, provides us with a very good example of this initiative. Planned in 1947, this encyclopaedia was published between 1954 and 1963. Similar initiatives were taken by other educational institutions in India. In this paper I would focus on an encyclopedic project taken up by Utkal University in Orissa in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century and seek to show how representations of the west underwent significant transformations.

The first volume of *Sankhipta Odiya Gyanakosha or Encyclopaedia Orissana* was published on 2 January 1963 under the auspices of Utkal university, which had been set up in 1943 in Orissa. Five thousand copies were printed. The second volume came out on 1 October 1963. The print run was five thousand copies. The third volume appeared on 1 December 1964. Its print run was also five thousand copies. The fourth and final volume of the encyclopedia was published on 1 November 1965 and five thousand copies of the volume were printed. The editor of the four-volume encyclopedia was Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh, a British educated Shakespeare scholar, who had conceived the project in the 1940s, when he was a principal of a college.

The Introduction to the first volume of *Gyanakosha* presents the following brief account of the genesis of this encyclopaedia :

After Utkal University was founded educationists, academics and writers made an effort to compile an encyclopaedia in Oriya. A proposal for undertaking such a project was placed by Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh before the Senate of the University in 1949. Later the proposal was also placed before the Committee for Development of Oriya Literature set up by the University. On 7 February 1951, Dr. Mansingh sent an appeal to authors, journalists and academics in Orissa. In 1955, he published at his own expense, a sample or model encyclopaedia, which gave an outline of the kind of encyclopaedia that should serve the needs of the world today.

After this, the University sent Dr. Mansingh to Madras University, when he studied ways in which Tamil and Telegu

encyclopaedias were being compiled. He submitted his report to the Syndicate of Utkal University on 14 February 1956. After much discussion of this report the plan to compile an encyclopedia was approved by the Senate on 28 June 1956.

The work on compiling *Gyanakosha* began in 1958 and it was decided that the project would be executed through five stages, which involved taking decisions on the entries which should go into an Oriya encyclopaedia, arranging these alphabetically as well as according to subject and size of the entries, consultation with subject experts and commissioning experts to contribute various entries, editing and revising the entries and, finally, printing and selling the volumes.

The original plan was to publish several volumes but certain circumstances compelled the editor to alter the original plan. On 16 February 1959, the board of editors of *Gyanakosha* received a letter from the Chief Minister of Orissa, Dr. H. K. Mahtab. In the letter the Chief Minister advised them to publish a shorter version of the encyclopaedia for the benefit of the general public as soon as possible. Acting on the advice of the Chief Minister the Board contented itself with the publication of a small four-volume encyclopaedia. It contains 3787 articles, 612 illustrations 222 references, and consists of 1945 pages. The editor hoped that it would be followed by the publication of a larger multi-volume encyclopedia. This, however, never happened: (Introduction to *Gyanakosha* Vol. II: 4). The failure to complete the project of publishing a multi-volume encyclopaedia left its editor disappointed and embittered.

The introductory note provided by the editor makes one aware of certain changes of direction in encyclopedia writing in Orissa. *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* are mentioned to indicate the difficulties involved in executing an ambitious encyclopaedic project in India. The editor also talks about the target readership of his encyclopedia.

We have tried to make sure that, if this encyclopedia is made available to a middle English or upper primary school, the people of that area will find in it a library. We have chosen

to include in its subjects which will give it the character of a mobile library. (Introduction to *Gyanakosha*; Vol. III, 1)

He makes it clear that the target readership of the encyclopaedia consists of teachers of primary and middle schools in rural India. (Introduction to *Gyanakosha* Vol. III: 5). This is significant in view of the fact that earlier encyclopaedias never conceived of their readership so narrowly. One may contrast this with a statement on the target readership made in an encyclopaedia in Oriya compiled in 1935 :

I hope that it will find a place in all government and non-government institutions, law courts, schools, colleges and libraries. (*Ramakosha* 1935: 1)

A poet expresses the hope that *Ramakosha* would be as much treasured as copies of almanacs in Orissa. Lala Nagendra Kumar Ray, the compiler of *Bibidha Ratna Sangraha*, published in 1936 describes his target readership in even more extravagant terms :

What we need is a book which would suit everyone -- a young boy as well as an old man, a school boy as well as the Vice-Chancellor of a university, a daily labourer as well as a millionaire; people from all classes and sections, in all conditions of life should find it useful. It would enable people sitting at home get news and information on everything happening in the whole world ... Again, the book would be as enjoyable as a work of fiction, as fascinating as a purana and, above all else, must be full of useful lessons. (Ray 1936: Introduction)

The project thus betrays an elitist bias and does not share the belief in democratizing knowledge which had animated earlier encyclopaedic projects taken up before independence and which shaped the objectives of encyclopaedists like Binode Kanungo who began working on his multi-volume Oriya encyclopaedia in the fifties of the twentieth century.

The introduction to the second volume reveals another interest facet of the project. The editor emphasizes that the encyclopaedia would provide no space for superstitions or irrationality and that

it would participate in the project of building a progressive, self-reliant developed nation :

In the whole of the encyclopaedia we have made no allowances for superstitions or irrationality of any kind for our modest aim in compiling this encyclopaedia is to contribute in however small a way to the task of building a self-reliant, progressive, new Indian nation which would be free from all kinds of suppression. To promote national integration we have included in this short encyclopaedia impartial and objective accounts of religions of the world, of various regional languages, literatures and cultures of India and the contribution they have made to human civilization. We have also made a conscious effort to emphasise what we need to learn from foreign races. We have not neglected to include, wherever possible, entries which would keep alive in the hearts of the young love and respect for their mother land. (*Gyanakosha*: Introduction to Vol. 3).

What one comes across here is a new rhetoric of nation building which no longer adopts an anti-colonial stance towards the imperialistic west.

The encyclopaedia features a large number of entries on western nations and western scientists and statesmen and thinkers. But the tone adopted is often neutral and sometimes laudatory. No attempt is made to draw a parallel between India and these nations with a view to denigrating the latter but a silent assumption that these present models to be emulated is everywhere present. Take for instance the entry on England, the erstwhile ruler of India. After providing information on the geographical location, demography, industries, minerals of this country, the entry goes on to inform the reader about its universities. The following observations deserve particular attention:

The level of the cultural attainment of common people here is high. The British are famous worldwide for their good manners. English language has become the most sought after international language. English literature has achieved world

time. The British are a freedom loving race. Their history is a history of ceaseless struggle for individual liberty and the freedom of the masses. This small island nation, as the ruler of half of the globe, has civilised many countries and races... The way it has voluntarily withdrawn from its colonies such as India, Ceylon and Burma and granted them independence is without a precedent in world history. (*Gyanakosha* Vol. 1: 264).

Similar sentiments are expressed with reference to other western nations such as Finland. The positive sentiments expressed with reference to western nations are not confined to countries in Europe alone; they are extended to the larger western world, which now encompasses the United States of America. The emergence of America as the leader of the western world and a benefactor of countries in Asia after they are decolonized is viewed with great enthusiasm by the compilers of this encyclopaedia. Consider the following observation with reference to United States of America:

The standard of living enjoyed by an American citizen is the highest in the world. The comfort and prosperity which is available to an ordinary American citizen is beyond the members of the most privileged classes in India. Maidservants in America come to work in their employers' houses riding cars. It is help from America which enables many nations in Asia and Europe to develop themselves. (*Gyanakosha* Vol. 4: 111)

Such laudatory references are, interestingly, denied to countries, eastern or western, if they happen to have embraced communism. Hostility to communism and an anti-communist stance is evident in many entries dealing with various nations. Communism is viewed throughout *Gyanakosha* as a sinister ideology which curtails and destroys individual liberty. All pretence to neutrality and objectivity is abandoned whenever an opportunity to present a critique of communism makes itself available in this encyclopaedia. Consider the harsh comment on the legacy of Sparta:

It is a part which is the source of the tendency we find in Nazi and communist ideologies — the tendency completely to destroy individuality, to reduce human beings into a cog in the machine of the state through relentless collectivization, and to interfere in every aspect of an individual's life. (*Gyanakosha* Vol. 1: 408-409).

In the entry on Democracy, this form of government is unequivocally presented as the antithesis of communist and fascist forms of government. The latter are accused of trying to deceive the popular mind with attractive notions of communism and dictatorship of the proletariat. These dispensations respond to dissent with brute force: bullets or imprisonment without trial. (*Gyanakosha* Vol. 2: 262). It is not surprising therefore to find the entry on China stating that communism has distorted the culture of China. The country is described as a huge trade union and an army camp. (*Gyanakosha* Vol. 2: 405). It is to be expected that Finland receives high praise in the encyclopaedia for not having become a communist state in spite of being a neighbor of USSR. (*Gyanakosha* Vol. 3: 444).

The tone of neutrality also makes its absence felt when entries on matters close to home are presented. Take for instance the entry on Urdu, a language that originated in India during Muslim rule. The tone of the writer of the entry here is far from neutral and one detects a note of impatience and sarcasm.

After India was partitioned, Urdu was not included by the Constitution in the list of Indian languages for the reason that it is not the language of any specific region. However, Sahitya Akademi has recognized Urdu literature as national literature and Indian muslims have been clamouring for according to Urdu language the primacy it had enjoyed in the past (*Gyanakosha* Vol. 1: 346).

Similarly, in the entry of Laksminarayan Pattanaik, an Oriya entrepreneur and reformer, unsavory remarks made about Oriyas by the nationalist Bengali scientist, Prafulla Chandra Ray, is brought

in to explain why the former decided to set up Orissa Chemicals (*Gyanakosha* Vol. 4: 200)

Thus, the attitudes to the west undergo a significant change in encyclopaedias compiled after independence and new priorities and new areas of contention appear under the guise of 'neutral and rational' knowledge. As a discussion of *Gyanakosha* shows, possibly under the influence of the Cold War, democratic nations in the west are singled out for a favourable treatment and communism and the systems of governance associated with it are presented in a negative light. Since the west has ceased to be associated with imperial rule the entries on the west no longer offer a critique of the west. Instead, the non-communist west is held up as an example worth emulating and the communist countries in the west as well as in the east are seen as posing a serious threat to individual liberty and tradition. A new dimension of the post-independence encyclopaedic projects draws attention to itself: it is the tensions among cultures and communities and religions within the emergent nation that sometimes find expression in the encyclopaedia entries.

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**SPIRITUALISM IN COLONIAL BENGAL:
IMAGING NATION/IMAGINING CONJUGALITY—(1814-1883)**

i

This essay employs the vector of spirit-studies, and fascination with paranormal/psychic phenomena, to explore the complex relation between colonial Bengal/India, Victoria's England, and North America, at the turn of the 19th century. Focusing on the late 19th/early 20th century Bengali India's attraction for the spirit world, the study examines their engagement with the paranormal world, and sees such preoccupations as responses to the realities of colonial subjugation. Such engagement would range from the formation of spirit societies; conducting of séance, *planchette* sessions to communicate with the disembodied; practice of clairvoyance, telepathy, thought transference, hypnotism to test the limits of human mind; use of magnetism, trance, mesmerism, hypnosis as alternative modes of healing; production of spiritual/psychic/uncanny narratives; and, the inscribing of culture-specific identities thereby.

In the process the essay focuses on spirit-studies in colonial India as means of defining 'nation', 'conjugality' and the imagined ideal of the Hindu woman. The essay foregrounds the life and times of a Bengali empiricist/satirist-turned-spiritualist, Peary Chand Mitra¹ (1814-1883); his involvement with modern Western spiritualism, and his creation of a distinct genre in Bengali, namely the 'spiritual novel'. An examination of his life and works (with reference to other contemporary Indian intellectuals, who claimed to be materialists/positivists, but were equally fascinated with European spiritual/psychic studies)² exposes, I believe, all the

contradictory tensions circulating through this transnational relationship.

ii

Born in Paniscola village of Hooghly district in 1814 in British Bengal, Peary Chand Mitra came under the influence of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio from 1827, as a student of Hindu College. Peary Chand was one of the leading lights of the Young Bengal Movement¹, with its overtly secularist, rationalist, and positivist agenda. His primacy within the Young Bengal group may be understood by the fact that Peary Chand edited both *Jnananwesan* (knowledge seeking) and the bilingual *Bengali Spectator* -- the propagating organs of the movement. He was also committed to the dissemination of a scientific approach to life, and published several essays directed towards social reform in general, and adoption of new agricultural techniques in particular (*Krsipatha* or Agricultural Essays, 1861).

As a littérateur, Peary Chand will remain known for his vitriolic *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (translated as *The Spoilt Child of the House of Alal* by the author), etching the 'progress' of a rake in colonial Bengal. He was described as the 'Dickens of Bengal' by no less a personage than Reverend James Long, for his realistic depiction of 19th century urban Bengali society, and employment of the comic/ironic mode of representation.

Strangely enough, Peary Chand also pioneered paranormal, psychic and theosophical studies in colonial Bengal. In his Preface to *On the Soul: Its Nature and Developments* (1881a) he writes :

I was born in 1814 and brought up as an idolater. I received my education at Hindu College [...] Metaphysics and Psychology were my favourite studies and the reading of standard works on these subjects and on theistic and Christian authors as well as of Arya works, in Sanskrit and Bengali, produced a living conviction that there is but one God of infinite perfection. [...] In 1860, I lost my wife, which convulsed

no much. I took to the study of spiritualism which I confess, I would not have thought of otherwise nor relished its charms. [...] Dr. Berigny came to Calcutta subsequently, and we had weekly sances at his house. At one of the sances, I was developed as a medium. From 1860 I have been deeply engaged in spiritual studies -- spiritual contemplation. [...] The higher the theosophy of this life is, the more complete will be the nirvana [...] (1881a: i).

Consequently, he began importing and reading European books on spiritualism. European spiritualists, coming to be aware of Peary's interests, invited him to be part of their quest for greater spiritual knowledge. In 1880, Peary established the United Association of Spiritualists and became its Vice-President. From 1877 onwards, he began writing regularly on spiritual/psychic issues, and was published in Anglo-American journals. Some such essays have been anthologized in Mitra's *The Spiritual Stray Leaves* (1879a) and *Stray Thoughts on Spiritualism* (1880a). The thrills of spirit-studies helped intensify his belief in God. In the 'Preface' on *On the Soul* he notes that:

The private letters to me from eminent spiritualists and critical notices in the *Banner of Light*, *Medium* and *Spiritualist* were highly encouraging. Having made subjective spiritualism my special study for many years and looking upon theosophy as the be all and end all of all our being, I have ventured to bring out this work (1881a: ii).

Peary Chand was in close touch with Alexander Calder, President of the British National Association of Spiritualists, (Mitra: 1879a, ii); Edwin C. Adams, editor/publisher of the North-American spiritualist journal *Banner of Light* (Mitra: 1879a, iii); Andrew Jackson Davis, who recommended Peary Chand's "Psychology of the Aryas" for its publication in *The Banner of Light* in March, 1877 (Mitra: 1879a, iiii), and Henry Steel Olcott who praised his "Psychology of the Buddhists" that had appeared in the London-based journal *Spiritualist* in 1877 (1879a: ii).

Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott came to be acquainted with Peary Chand through his English writings, published primarily in the London-based journal, *Spiritualist* and the North American *Banner of Light*, and in 1879, when they established the Indian Theosophical Society in Chennai, they published Peary Chand's essay "The Inner God" in the first issue of the Society's organ the *Theosophist*. In that essay, Peary Chand noted that "the end of Spiritualism is Theosophy" (as quoted in Bandopadhyay 1971: 12).

Peary Chand remained the president of the Calcutta Chapter of the Theosophical Society from its inception on 17th April, 1882, till his death, with Dwijendralal Tagore as its co-President.

iii

Peary Chand's perception of spiritualism as coeval of European modernity must be contextualized. While the second half of 19th century Europe in general, and Victorian England in particular, was the high noon of industrialization, technicization and secularization, this period was also, paradoxically, marked by a desire to question positivist, empiricist discourses, and discover alternative psychic worlds, resistant to the secular, material, and rationally explicable one. This desire expressed itself through the birth and flourishing — across England and North America — of numerous psychic societies,⁴ ghost clubs,⁵ spiritualist journals,⁶ spiritualist churches,⁷ and human mediums⁸ who claimed to have special access to the spirit world.

Most books on this subject⁹ — possibly taking their cue from Alan Gauld's impressive study, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (1968) — trace the origins of Anglo-American interest in the paranormal world to the Fox sisters' 'apprehension' of rapping spirits in their Hydesville, New York residence in 1848; and the subsequent claims of the sisters, Margaretta and Catherine, about their ability to communicate with the spirits of the dead, or act as mediums in séances.

Regardless of the originary cause (if any), this interest in paranormal phenomena can be seen as an extension of the Victorian spirit of enquiry, and the desire to explain/contain the 'inexplicable' and 'unknown'. It is also certainly the outcome of a desire to develop alternative knowledge paradigms that were, if not radically opposed to, then at least in a state of volatile dialogue with the positivist/empiricist structures of knowledge. The complexity of the relationship and the permeability of borders may be gauged in so far as spirit-studies (defined as best as unverified speculation) actually produced 'scientific' knowledge, and in that spiritualists employed 'scientific' language and methodology to validate their position.¹⁰

The research of quasi-scientific bodies such as the Society for Psychical Research regarding the human mind in a state of hypnotic trance, contributed to the understanding and development of the concept of plural selves, and multiple consciousness within one being; and the emergence of clinical psychology as an empirical and scientific discipline. A distinctive researcher of the SPR, Frederic Myers, reached the following conclusion through his sustained engagement with spiritualism:

[t]he stream of consciousness in which we habitually live is not the only consciousness which exists in connection with our organism. Our habitual or empirical consciousness may consist of a mere selection from a multitude of thoughts and sensations, of which some at least are equally conscious with those that we empirically know. I accord no primacy to my ordinary waking self, except that among my potential selves this one has shown itself fittest to meet the needs of common life. I hold that it has established no further claim, and that it is perfectly possible that other thoughts, feelings and memories, either isolated or in continuous connection may now be actively conscious, as we say, "within me," — in some kind of coordination with my organism, and forming some part of my total individuality (Myers, 1891 2: 301, 305, as quoted in Openheim, 1985: 257).

In an essay entitled "Monism" (1887), Edmund Gurney rejected the concept of unified sensibility, noting that every single being possessed multiple consciousness. This conjecture was followed up in *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (co-authored by Frederick Myers, Edmund Gurney and Frank Podmore in 1903) and the idea of the human consciousness as plural, multiple, and various, established.

Victorian interest in multiple selves, or in the existence of the uncanny, reached its intellectual culmination in Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). Freud's subsequent works, attempting to map the human unconscious, provided theoretical tools for the post-enlightenment subject to engage with the alternative worlds of *unheimlich*, and unreason.

What is equally remarkable is the Victorian scientist's use of evolutionary, discursive structures (in the wake of Lamarckian and Darwinian researches regarding the origin/evolution of species, and natural selection) to explain the development of a human mind (otherwise gross and impervious) into a spiritually attuned one. Sir Francis Galton, author of the famous treatises *Hereditary Genius* 1869, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* 1883, *Natural Inheritance* 1889; the progenitor of eugenics research in England; and propagator of purposeful selection ideology, and Alfred Russell Wallace, the co-discoverer of the theory of natural selection in 1850, were firmly convinced about the special abilities of the human mind at a higher state of evolutionary process to apprehend and interact with spirits, and defy the inexorable process of natural selection.

iv

For Europeans such as Helena Petrovna Blavastsky (1831-1891) or North Americans such as Henry Stell Olcott (1851-1896), the spiritual and psychic came to represent a sphere where India had superior knowledge *vis-a-vis* the West, and this prompted them to relocate the headquarters of the Theosophical Society originally

established in New York, in 1875) to India, in Adyar, Chennai in 1879. The radical fringe of Victorian intellectuals, such as Edward Carpenter (1844-1929)¹¹, Anna Kingsford (1846-1888)¹² and Annie Besant (1847-1933), increasingly recognized India as spiritually rich and possessing knowledge, unknown and unknowable to the grossly-material and impervious West.

For the colonized Indian, this new Western enthusiasm was welcome as it gave them (i) a distinct 'space' and 'leverage' within the 'modern' European knowledge system, (ii) an opportunity to 'modernize', 'modernize' and thereby 'validate' their culture-specific spiritual systems, and (iii) a means to initiate a 'dialogue' between their 'pre-modern' spiritual faith-structures and 'modern' European ideas.

This 'modern' engagement with the spiritual phenomena also helped the subjugated Indian to fashion a suitably 'heroic' and 'culturally distinct' identity, and thereby forge a sense of nationhood. A study of Peary Chand's works (or works of major spiritualists operating in India such as Henry Olcott and Annie Besant) reveals that such 'fashioning' was inevitably gender-inflected. While it may be debated as to whether engagement with spiritual thought-structures granted Indian women any great degree of agency, it is nevertheless true that the turn-of-the-century spiritualist movement in India was intimately associated with the project of *bhadramahila*-fashioning-the 'making' of a culturally-distinct help meet, for the Hindu *bhadralok*¹³. It was equally true that the movement itself was fraught with subversive potential¹⁴.

In the context of India, the doctrines of the Theosophical Society proved to be the most influential, primarily because Helena Blavatsky claimed 'Eastern', Hindu Brahmanic, and specifically Buddhist sources, as shaping her system. In hindsight (especially the hindsight of a contemporary Indian, Hindu Brahmin like me) such claims appear diffuse and muddled.

What is important however is the influence Blavatsky exerted on Indian minds at the close of the 19th century; the ways in which her ideas served as catalyst for flourishing of various spiritualist

'schools' in colonial India; and how, her ideas (as primarily articulated by Henry Olcott and Annie Besant) leavened Indian nationalist discourses.¹⁵

v

However, it is in his expressly spiritual/psychic novels -- *Avedi or the Spiritualist: A Spiritual Tale* (an English rendering of an originally Bengali novel, *Avedi* written in 1871 by Peary Chand) and *Adhyatmika* (1880b, a Bengali narrative whose title signifies 'the woman with the soul') that Peary Chand's attempts to forge a distinct nationalist identity, and it is in the 'reading' of such narratives that the nature/scope of this cultural transaction may be fully gauged.

It must be noted that these narratives come at the end of Peary Chand's illustrious career as an essayist-littérateur, and creator of what many designate as the 'first novel' in Bengali -- *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1858). Peary Chand's spiritual novels are distinctive in their espousal of a strange, asymmetrical, dialogic structure, very different from the predominantly 'narrated' form of the contemporary English novel¹⁶.

The debates between the fictional characters in Peary Chand's spiritual narratives - proposing/denying/rejecting/accepting the spiritualist position-anticipate the enlightened Bengali readers' reason-predicated resistance to such belief systems; only to subsume them, and ultimately affirm their validity. However, such affirmation in the spiritualist position (in Peary Chand's narratives) is almost never a matter of implicit faith, but a process of 'achieved understanding'.

This transition from a position of implicit faith (culturally sanctioned by traditional Hindu *dharma*, and its associated spiritualist literature) to achieved faith in a 'modern' spiritual system is interesting because it embodies the ambivalences at the heart of this cultural transaction. Peary Chand born an idolater, converted to a 'reformed' rational, empiricist position in times of colonial

modernity; and re-covered to spiritualist 'faith', convulsed by the death of his beloved wife—is typical of the reformed/enlightened Hindu *bhadralok*, who wishes to, but can no longer return to the traditional, faith-based spiritual systems in an unquestioning manner¹⁷.

This complex and contested nature of the cultural transaction, where issues such as faith v/s reason; science v/s religion; unquestioning submission to irrational beliefs v/s validation of spiritualism as a 'scientific' creed, were inextricably intertwined, it would perhaps make sense to study one of Peary Chand's contemporaries, the defiantly-materialist-till-death, Akshay Kumar Dutta (1820-1886). Though Akshay Dutta was deeply influenced by George Coombe and phrenology (a system considered today as coterminous with spiritualism/paranormal studies)¹⁸ enough to inscribe a Bengali response entitled *Bahya Bastur Sahit Manab Prakritir Sambandha Itar* (1852, an argument regarding the relationship between the human mind and the material world), he firmly believed that phrenology was a rational/scientific system, having little to do with spiritualist mumbo-jumbo¹⁹. Significantly, Akshay Dutta resigned from the editorship of *Tattwabodhini Patrika* suspecting its chief patron, Devendranath Tagore (father of Rabindranath Tagore) to be inadequately inclined towards the rational/scientific position, and not supportive enough of the journal's positivist/rationalist agenda.

What is more revetting (and indicative of the complex nature of the colonial subjects' response to questions of 'reason' and 'faith') is Akshay Dutta's attempts to 'modernize'/'systematize' traditional Hindu belief systems, in his magisterial *Bharatvarsiya Upasak Sampraday* (the community of Indian ascetics/seekers of spiritual truth). Dutta attempts a taxonomical study of the traditional Indian spiritual systems/sets — in the manner of his imperial masters — in full awareness that such systems were essentially amorphous; predicated on implicit belief, and thereby resistant to colonial methods of codification/classification.

Peary Chand, like many of his contemporaries, could only find consolation through engagement with the 'new' faith-systems that

were sanctioned by, and emerging from, the cultural domain of the 'rational' West. He recounts, in the form of an allegorical narrative entitled *Avedi or the Spiritualist: A Spiritual Tale*, the quest of character (appropriately named Anweshan [the seeker] Chandra) for spiritual truths. Anweshan meets several characters on his journey, such as the deracinated materialist, Baboo Sahib and his equally materialist friend Jeko [vain, conceited] Baboo, and their crass rejection of the spiritualist position. This rejection of the spiritualist position dovetails with their denunciation of all that is indigenous. Jeko Baboo and Baboo Sahib's description of the spiritualist/paranormal thought-structure, as coterminous of the Indian colonial subjects' 'primitive' mindset, is noteworthy:

All this is simple. Where is the proof? Those who do not study physical sciences properly, and do not know exact modes of ascertaining truth, are always plugging themselves in the dark abyss of error. The physicist ought to dissipate such error by the light of their exact knowledge. But as this is not done, the village is going to the dogs! (1879a: 67)

Baboo Sahib witnesses Jeko's wife keeping facts and giving ritual feasts to village Brahmins and breaks out in a vitriolic anger: "Ignorant Bengalis! [...] Europeans do not behave thus. If you would bring your wife to your way of thinking, you must cease to encourage her in the observance of such vain ceremonies" (1879a: 79-80).

Clearly, in the context of Mitra's narrative, it is the spiritually-attuned Anweshan Chandra who is worthy of emulation as both the defender, as well as the embodiment of indigenous traditions. Anweshan's possession of actually distinctive identity, is paradoxically enough, also leavened by his sound knowledge of European spiritualist, as well as Western philosophic (primarily Platonic) ideologies. Arrogant, but ultimately ignorant (or superficially - Westernized) mimic-men such as Jeko and Baboo Sahib, must finally submit to the superior 'Indian' and the intellectually-cosmopolitan identity of Anweshan Chandra.

As the narrative comes to a close, Anweshan is witness to Jeko and Baboo Sahibs' suffering as they lose their beloved ones in death: their chastening through suffering, and their ultimate coming around to accept the spiritualist position.

Anweshan's views on the various reformist religious sects of Bengal, especially the *Brahmos*, comprising of sub-sects such as *Adi* (original/traditional), *Nabya* (progressive) and *Kesabite* (followers of Kesab Chandra Sen); and Christians are equally noteworthy. While Anweshan rejects the arrogant approach of progressive *Bramha* priests towards any faith-based system, he does accord a degree of respect to traditional (*Adi*) *Brahmo* faith (1879a: 68-69). Significantly, he dedicates his *On the Soul* to Debendranath Tagore, the *Pradhana Acarya* (chief priest) of the *Adi Bramho Samaj*.

In a strange reversal of categories, the narrative's espousal of a Western spiritualist system ultimately validates a resurgent Hindu position, and the debate between Anweshan and *Brahmos* (of various hues), or Christians help the Peary Chand's fictional protagonist to realize the 'right' religion for the 'new' nation.

It is the materialistic West-within-the-Indian that is the butt of Peary Chand's ridicule, rather than the Western himself. Spirituality, Peary Chand reiterates, is a frame of mind that must be achieved in absolute humility and self-abnegation. Repeated in his works, as various as *Avedi or the Spiritualist*, *Jat Kincit*, and *Adhyatmika*, he exposes the falsity of religious debates that are fuelled by egotism rather than any true desire for divine knowledge. It is reforms religions like the *Bramho dharma* in all its avatars that comes for the hardest criticism. All pretences to ego and overt pride, says Peary Chand, must first be sacrificed before any hope of uniting with the spirit and the divine may be achieved. Spiritualist ideas also serve to 'humanize' the arrogant colonizer, and to expose his Hind, ameliorating and 'Asiatic' face.

For Indian like Peary Chand (or Mohandas Gandhi later), the study of Western spiritualism enables the discovery of a kinder, non-material, and non-aggressive side of Protestant Christianity — a perspective that was hardly available to the colonized subject.

exposed as they were to the harsh Evangelical aspect of Christian faith; and habituated as they were of associating Christianity with the arrogance of the colonizer. Spiritualism for Peary Chand, far from propagating agnosticism, is a means of leading the superficially-Westernized, deracinated Indian back to his faith — the *sanatan* Hindu *dharma* in particular and the God-loving position in general.

In yet another narrative entitled *The Human and the Spiritual* and anthologized in *The Spiritual Stray Leaves* (Mitra: 1879a, 180-194) Peary Chand depicts the debate between a materialist brother A and spiritualist brother B. In fact most of Peary's spiritualist narratives are dialogically constructed, and the final position, validating the spiritualist stance, is articulated in an attenuated and non-coercive fashion.

The conversation in *The Human and the Spiritual* is worth recording for an understanding of the Bengali gentleman's swings between belief and skepticism: A-says: "I have read much, thought much, but cannot find out what soul is. [...] other spiritual phenomena may be explained away. These may rise from nervous causes or from the will-force and are not therefore conclusive evidence" (Mitra: 1879a, 810). B goes on to garner evidence regarding the existence of the soul from every possible source, European or Asian, beginning with Plato, and ending with the Upanishads. Responding to A's question "Do you believe that mortals can communicate with spirits?" B notes conclusively that; "If we admit that we live after we die, which is incontestably proved by the nature and powers of the soul, than what becomes of the disembodied spirits? [...] They are therefore eager to communicate with mortals fit to be mediums by the purity of their lives. By spiritualizing mortals, the spirits open to them the spirit-world [...] [such mortals can be transformed] from writing mediums [to] clairaudients and talk with spirits as they talk with human beings". When A notes that "This will never be believed and will be attributed to hallucination" B explains that "those who are thorough materialists, and are incapable of raising their thoughts above this world, must

look upon spiritualists as imposters or insane, and objects of derision" (1879a: 191-193).

In *Jat Kincit* (literally, 'Slight', or 'Just a bit', 1865) Peary Chand Mitra explores this theme of 'rational' enquiry of 'spiritualist' truths, once again, through dialogues between characters called Gyanananda (Joyous in possession of knowledge) and Premananda (Joyous in possession of love).

This back and forth swing and a dialogically contested note, is the hallmark of Peary Chand's writing. It mirrors the swings within the newly 'enlightened' and reformed Bengali *bhadralok's* mind. Systematically 'othered' by the colonizer for 'lack' of rational, secular mindset/culture, the educated Indian subject is quick to internalize positivist/empiricist cultural ideals issuing from European origins. Now when that same 'culturally conditioned' subject is compelled to engage with a-rational structures of thought (albeit originating from, and albeit sanctioned by the same West), s/he (in a strange reversal of categories) feels obliged to employ a questioning/dialogic mode to negotiate its 'strangeness'.

vi

That characters in Peary Chand Mitra's narratives express themselves in a complex intertwining of evolutionary Darwinian/evolutionary Theosophist language, and thereby espouse a philosophy that is modern and yet eternal, is equally revealing. In *Avedi or the Spiritualist: A Spiritualist Tale*, Anweshan Chandra finally meets Paribhabini, his female soul mate, and they (in fashion of Dante and Beatrice) ascend the Ramna mountain (in Dacca of the present Bangladesh) in search of the Master -- Avedi (or literally, the non-dual one, one whose soul is united with god), and the final spiritual truth that he is repository of. Avedi describes how he attended many spiritual seances and saw tables, chairs, and objects lifted/moved by an unseen agency (103-4), how he came to free the soul from bodily chains and finally merge with god.

The novel ends with Avedi's exhortation to Anweshan to continuously strive for perfection and attainment of the soul state :

March, brother, from stage to stage. Do not think the stage you arrive at is the last you are to reach, but consider that the more stages you pass, the nearer you are to that where pain and sorrow, fear and doubt, are no more; and that then the eternal sky, with no day or night, but unceasingly radiating with light and beauty will appear before you. The more you are free from what is earthly, the more rapidly will you progress toward that state which is above the world of sense (1879a: 106-07) ⁹.

vii

Adhyatmika (1880b) as a spiritual novel is distinctive in its foregrounding of Peary Chand's overacting agenda --- that is the inscribing of cultural-specific, and revivalist identity for the Hindu woman, in times of colonial modernity. The complex interface of the nation and conjugality-question, and the undifferentiated linguistic/cultural codes enunciating such positions, in turn of the century colonial India has been comprehensively recorded. What has received relatively little critical attention is the modern Indian spiritualist discourses as leavening and inflecting 'constructions' of an ideal Hindu wife for the resurgent Hindu nation ²¹. Peary Chand spent a lifetime addressing women's issues and wrote three books *Ramaranjika* (For pleasure of women, 1860), *Ettadeshiya Streetokdiger Purbabastha* (Condition of the women of this country in the Past, 1879b), *Adhyatmika* (the woman with the soul, 1880b), and *Bamatoini* (Pleasing a woman, 1881b) addressing the Hindu female question.

In the Preface to *Adhyatmika* (1880b), Peary Chand notes:

I beg now to present another work intended specially for the Hindu fair sex, entitled *Adhyatmika*, in the form of a novel, the contents of which are as follow: (1) The excellence of

female education consisting in the development of the soul, (2) Direction for the development of the soul by pure meditation and yoga culture, (3) Life of purity and communion with god can only be the result of the soul-state, (4) Powers of the soul, internal lucidity, clairvoyance and magnetism as being curative of diseases, (5) Conversation of females on female education, social and spiritual, (6) Study of astronomy calculated to elevate the mind, (7) Directions for the Yoga culture, (8) Humanity to the brute creation, [...] (1971: i) ²²

In the same "Preface" Peary Chand sees *Adhyatmika* as the culmination of all his works about women, and significantly catalogues the contents of *Ramaranjika* (an advice manual written primarily in aid of fashioning the new *pativrata* wife) only to foreground the all important component of the husband's 'advice'

that is the spiritualist attenuating of the virtuous-wife's mind (i). He also sees *Avedi*, *Ettadeshiya Streetlokidiger Purbabastha*, and articles such as "Culture of Hindu Females in Ancient Times" (anthologized in *Spiritual Stray Leaves*) as being produced through the interface of the spiritualist and the woman question (i-ii).

Adhyatmika tells the strange tale of a Hindu girl with such superbly developed spiritual faculties that she is called *Adhyatmika* or one who embodies spiritualism. She possesses enough psychic powers to agitate magnetic fields, generate pass-movements and thereby, cure patients. She is also endowed with the powers of second sight, and is thus able to narrate the intimate and familial details of a Scottish lady whom she had no chance of meeting or knowing earlier. This novel ends with the self-predicted and self-executed death of *Adhyatmika* and the strange mingling of her body with the spiritual world. This novel, like *Avedi or the Spiritual Tale*, reveals theosophical influences in that it recommends a continuous search for that non-dual state where the body and spirit are one.

It is not entirely coincidental that *Adhyatmika* (in the eponymous novel), a colonized subject and a mere slip of a girl residing in

a nondescript village is able to stun a European lady into a position of reverence and humanity. The Scotswoman is forced to acknowledge that though she has witnessed instances of such psychic powers and 'second sight' in her own country, she has never met anything quite so remarkable, and especially as it comes from a member of a subjugated, heathenish, 'premodern' culture. It is in the sphere of spirituality that the arrogant West, both within and without will be won.

The question of *fin-de-siècle* spirituality, Bengali narratives, and the women question cannot be addressed without a reference to the writings of one of the most remarkable women in colonial India — Sarala Devi Chaudhurani. Sarala's relation with Peary Chand is not a matter of conjecture but historically verified as her mother Swarnakumari Devi (sister to Rabindranath Tagore) was the president of the female wing of the Calcutta Theosophical Society from its inception in 1882. In her autobiography (again a generic pioneer, as women's autobiographies — with perhaps the exception of Rassundari Dasi's *Amar Jiban*, 1875 — were a rarity in colonial India), which she significantly named *Jibaner Jharapata* (The stray leaves of my life, 2007) she records the activities of theosophists such as Henry Olcott, and the involvement of Bengali gentry (men and women) in spiritual practices.

In fact, the very naming of her autobiography as *Jibaner Jharapata* or stray leaves of my life, is a conscious echo of titles of contemporary spiritual narratives/autobiographies, ranging from Henry Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves* (1878), to Peary Chand's *The Spiritual Stray Leaves* and *Stray Thoughts on Spiritualism* (1880c). In all probability - and Sarala does refer to something similar in the opening lines of her autobiography - the image of stray or scattered leaves is meant to convey an impression of ego erasure and self-abnegation, in a literary form - as defiantly ego-inscribing, as the **auto**-biography (emphasis mine). The espousal of such a title, and the asymmetrical, disjointed nature of such narratives, is born of a willingness to see one's life/times as stray, scattered, or contingent rather than as inscribed by a conscious ego, and moving

towards a self-defined *telos*. Significantly, the expression- 'stray leaves' was also adopted by people dealing with asymmetries of the human mind. The redoubtable *fin-de-siècle* English psychiatrist specializing in lunacy, James Crichton-Brown, named his essay dealing with mental degeneration—"Stray Leaves from a physician's portfolio."

The image of scattered stray leaves, and the associated random, disjointed structure of spiritual narratives is a perfect 'alternative' to the European form of the autobiography, and the Euro-centric narrative structure of *building*, connoting a step-by-step development/and inscription of the narratorial self.

Sarala recounts Colonel Olcott's healing a crick in her neck by making pass movements in the magnetic field around her, and dispensing a ritually-potent drink (Chaudhurani 2007: 62-63). She also recounts Bengali women's engagement with spiritualist practices ranging from their enrolling as members of the theosophical society, acting as mediums, conducting séances, and hypnotizing subjects. She remembers how, after the 'fashion' of spiritualism was spent out, this same association was converted to a *sakhi-samity* (literally, a community of women friends) an organization for widowed and destitute women's welfare (2007: 64). Whereas such accounts, as left behind by as venerable a figure as Sarala Devi²¹, would induce readers to jump to conclusions regarding the ideological interface of women's emancipation movements, and *fin-de-siècle* spiritualism in colonial Bengal, it would be safer to read between lines of Sarala's memoir. Sarala speaks of spiritualism in terms of an initial attraction that was reduced to a passing fad, so far as women (drawn almost entirely from the elite Tagore family) were concerned. Not only is there a complete silence regarding the possibility of the movement gaining even a modicum of interest among wider section of women in Bengal (elite or otherwise), there is no reference to the spiritualist movement granting any agency for any kind of Bengali or Indian women, in Sarala's autobiography. On the contrary, there is a hint that women in her family were wont to measure psychic powers, and were ultimately dissuaded from using them (2007: 63-64).

The connections between an elite woman-activist as Sarala, and her immediate women-family-members' engagement with spirituality (however casual or brief) and the morphing of the same association into a women's organization, and Peary Chand's foregrounding of women figures in his spiritual novels, are not difficult to establish.

Though he seems to grant centrality to women in his narratives, (and Peary Chand's *Ramaranjika*, *Bamatoshini Ettadeshiya Streetlokidiger Purbabastha* and *Adhyatmika* were produced in direct response to the Charles Wood Despatch of 1854, and the colonial government's foregrounding of the women-question) approach is deeply reactionary as his spiritualist position ties up seamlessly with his overarching revivalist project of reigning in a woman's/physical/sexual impulses; rendering her 'asexual', 'divine' and therefore situated outside the domain of human desires. The women in his spiritual novels, such as Patibhabini (*Avedi or the Spiritualist*) and *Adhyatmika* (*Adhyatmika*) are not very different from the women in his *Ramaranjika* in their almost supernal ability to bear pain, deprivation, and lack of physical fulfillment. Significantly, while Annie Besant was well known for her advocating women's issues in *fin-de-siècle* England, theosophy in its operations in Bengal as an organized Society, almost purported to render the woman as bereft of human wants, and supported reactionary positions like prohibition of widow remarriage.

I rest my case with a reference to Mitra's *Ramaranjika* (For pleasure of women, 1860) as it combines in a most apposite manner the spiritualist-position; the woman-question and the conjugality issue in colonial India. The text, written in the form of a dialogic exchange between husband Harihar, and wife Padmabati, has the husband citing examples of legendary/iconic women figures drawn from mythological and historical sources, as normative, and worthy of emulation so far as the modern Indian woman is concerned. This narrative, like an earlier advice manual written in Hindi by Shiva Prasad and entitled *Vamamanaranjan* (Pleasing the Female, 1856) was produced in response to the British government's engagement

with the woman question in colonial India, in general, and Charles Wood's Despatch of 1854, in particular. Both texts however, in the ultimate analysis draw sustenance from Elizabeth Starling's *Noble Deeds of Women* (1848) and the Victorian discourses of conjugality, then decimated as normative. Ulrike Stark, in her *An Empire of Books* (2008), notes that so far as Shiva Prasad's *Vamamanaranjan* is concerned (and Stark, researching Hindi and Urdu book-history is possibly unaware of the existence of Mitra's *Ramaranjika*) such advice manuals actually provide an enabling perspective because they encourage women to come out of their 'private-domestic' role as child bearer/ domestic care-giver, and participate in the 'public' domain of service to nation and humanity. According to Stark, doing so, such text(s) enrich/re-animate nationalist 'constructions' of good wifely behavior, and posit it with a distinctly redemptive and transnational valence (Stark 2008: 415). Had Stark referred to Mitra's *Ramaranjika* - a far more thorough and faithful rendering of Starling's *Noble Deeds* - she would have surely noted that Mitra's recounting of exemplary lives of foreign and Indian women culminates in a description of the spiritually - attenuated virtuous Hindu wife - Drabamayi (Tale no 20). After all the "Preface" describes *Ramaranjika* as "a Tale showing what a Holy Woman can do." The Character of Drabamayi is enunciated through a principle of difference', even when the 'sameness' is seemingly articulated. Drabamayi kisses her husband fulsomely on his lips as he lies on his death pyre, and prays to the almighty for his safe passage to the other world, instead of mourning and lamenting for her imminent widowhood. She thus 'appears' strange, and Westernized to her immediate village audience (Mitra 1860: 251) She is, however, the virtuous, 'Hindu' wife incarnate as she conducts her entire life as a chaste widow, performing deeds of exceptional piety; and subjecting herself to extreme material-sacrifice, and self-denial. The Hindu that this 'new widow' prescribes for herself appear suspiciously alien to the brutal regimen of self-denial that society 'imposed' on the 'old' widow, as 'punishment' for her weak ritual potency and to the unwitting (?) 'cause' and her husband's death²⁵.

Where younger, marriageable girls of the village community are concerned, (and those are ones Drabamoyi instructs) she underscores the 'new Indian woman's' need to look beyond the wearing of Westernized clothes such as "gowns" or European accomplishments such as the playing of the "the piano-forte" (Mitra 1860: 262). If Drabamoyi's life-style is any clue, such newness of identity must be inscribed through the Indian wife's self-imposed denial of material well-being, and erasure of the very womanly body. Ulrike Stark would have also possibly noted that, the spiritually-attenuated Indian wife's heroic identity is inscribed not only through her persistent denial of bodily/material wants, but in her final self-predicted (as Drabamoyi is spiritually attenuated), and self-orchestrated (as she is the fearless 'new' wife to the 'new' nation) self-extinction. Colonial Bengal's engagement with spiritualism was fraught with subversive potential, but it was a potential that was only inadequately realized.

NOTES :

1. Peary Chand spells his name thus when he writes in English. However, in Bengali, his name is spelt as Pyaricand Mitra. This explains the difference in the spelling of his name in the bibliographical references to his English and Bengali works, respectively. He is consistently referred to as 'Mitra' in the parenthetical references within the body of the essay.
2. Peary Chand's contemporaries such as, the determined materialist Akshay Kumar Dutta (1820-1886), one-time editor of the Brahmo organ *Tattvabodhini Patrika* (a pioneering journal in the field of scientific publications in the Indian languages), or his juniors such as Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay (1847-1919), demographer, assistant to William Hunter, and agricultural technologist, are as fascinated with the paranormal/psychic phenomena, as they continue to pay obeisance to positivist sciences. Nationalists/creative artists such as Rabindranath Tagore, his sister, Swarnakumari Devi (1855-1932); and for that matter the entire, illustrious Tagore clan, share an ambivalent

relation with spiritualist systems/psychic phenomena. I believe that the Bengali Indians' problematic straddling of the material and spirit-world was a significant means of negotiating the anxieties of alien rule.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) was a lecturer in Hindu College in Kolkata, and leader of the Young Bengal Movement. That members of the Young Bengal movement were called Derozians, was a testimony to Derozio's abiding popularity/influence as a teacher. The Young Bengal movement were committed to eradication of 'pre-modern' faith-based systems, and advancement of enlightened, reason-predicated learning in India. Some important members of the movement were Raskrishna Mallick (1810-1858) who co-edited *Gyananimesan* with Peary Chand; Krishna Mohan Banerjee (1813-1885) who converted to Christian faith; Tara Chand Chakravarty, Shub Chandra Deb who espoused the Brahmo Dharma; Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee (1818-1887) chief patron of the Calcutta Female School, later known as Bethune School; Radha Nath Sikdar, the technocrat-surveyor; Ramtanu Lahiri (1813-1898), who adjoined the holy thread, distinctive of a male Hindu Brahmin; Hara Chandra Ghosh (1801-1868) and Ramgopal Ghosh (1815-1868). All these men were distinctive in their own rights, and the movement was a cultural watershed informing Bengali/Indian 'modernity'.

The British Association of Progressive Spiritualists (1860-1868), Psychological Society of Great Britain, Marylebone Spiritualist Association, and British National Association of Spiritualists (presided by Alexander Calder) are some of the many spiritual societies flourishing in late 19th century England. However, it is with the British Society for Psychical Research, a secular organization, established by a group of Cambridge scholars in 1882, to investigate spiritualist claims, that such studies gained global 'respectability'. The foremost of the members of the SPR were Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900), William James (1842-1910), Frank Podmore (1856-1910), Edmund Gurney (1843-1901) and Frederic Myers (1843-1901). William James went on to establish along with Sir William Barrett the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) in 1885.

5. An important dimension of Anglo-American interest in paranormal in the second half of the nineteenth century England was the burgeoning of ghost clubs and societies, all dedicated to the research of the unexplained and uncanny. As early as the 1850s, a Cambridge undergraduate, Edward White Benson, established the Ghost Society to collect and investigate ghost tales. A group of University College undergraduates of Oxford founded the Oxford Phantasmological Society in 1879. Another figure, who possibly gained the widest renown amongst British spiritualists, was Stainton Moses. It is significant that he was the member of SPR as well as the founder member of the Ghost Club of 1882 — a club that was dedicated to the production of an original ghost story or some psychological experience of interest.
6. *Spiritual Magazine* (1869-1874), *Medium and Daybreak* (1870-1895), *Spiritualist Newspaper* or the *Spiritualist* (1869-1882), the organ of the British National Association of Spiritualists, *Light* (1880-), and the *Two Worlds* (1887-1906) were some of the major journals devoted to the spiritualist/psychic cause in Victorian England. Apart from numerous other journals, almost every major late 19th century journal such as *Punch* or *Household Words* devoted a section or column to the spiritualist cause. In USA, a major journal produced from Boston, under the guidance of Andrew Jackson Davis was called *The Banner of Light*.
7. In the United States the Spiritualist churches are primarily affiliated with the National Spiritualist Association of Churches and in Britain with the Spiritualists' National Union, that was founded in 1901.
8. The Fox sisters, Emma Hardinge Britten, Cora Lavinia Scott in USA and Florence Cook in England were some of the well known 'mediums' who could 'communicate' and 'attract' spirits.
9. Refer to the English-language bibliography.
10. In her well researched and enlightening book on the Victorian interest in the paranormal (*The Other World*, 1985), Jenni Oppenheim explores the implicatedness of all positions in the 'other'; reveals how, far from spirit studies being opposed to the Victorian spirit of rational enquiry, was actually a necessary corollary, and complement to the same; and that the relation

between positivist scientists and spiritualists was a complex and contested one.

11. Influenced by the *Bhagwad Gita* and Transcendental philosophies, Edward Carpenter sees "the whole structure of civilization [as] being rapidly undermined" and Victorian materialism society as withering away in his *My Days and Dreams* (London: 1916, 217).
12. Anna Bonus Kingsford was a English mystical writer and doctor of medicine. She published *The Perfect Way or Finding Christ* in 1882, and became the President of the lodge of Theosophical Society in London. Her book *The Perfect Way* and her ideologies had an abiding effect on Mohandas Gandhi while he was a student of law in London, and went a long way in shaping Gandhi's nationalist thoughts.
13. Refer to Partha Chatterjee's "Woman and the Nation" in *Nation and its Fragments* (1983, 116-134), Meredith Borthwick's *Changing role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905*, (1984), Gulam Murshid's *The Reluctant Debutante* (1983), Tanika Sarkar's *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* (2001), and Geraldine Forbes' *Women in Modern India* (2004) for more on the emergence of the acculturated, genteel 'new woman' and the 'degree' of agency she was 'granted'/acquired', in colonial Bengal/India.
14. Spiritualist movements in North America and Victoria's England also came to be associated with every kind of subversive, anti-establishment, reforming movement. The English socialist Robert Owen's conversion to the spiritualist cause forged links between working class movements and spiritualism. As Alan Gauld notes; "the typical venue of a Spiritualist meeting was not a genteel parlour, but a Mechanics' Institute or a Temperance Hall" (Gauld: 1968, 74). In USA, the radical Quaker groups were instrumental in propagating spiritualist movements, especially as they were dissatisfied with the established churches' silence regarding working class, feminist, or racial issues. Amy and Isaac Post, Quakers in New York were instrumental in foregrounding/publicizing the Fox sisters' psychic powers in 1848. In fact, Spiritualism provided one of the first forums in which U.S. women could address mixed public audiences, and was in that sense, an important means

of self-expression. Cora L.V. Scott was an important medium. Ascha W. Sparague (1827) was an abolitionist and advocate of women's rights. Many of the most prominent Spiritualists were women, and most adherents supported radical cause.

15. Annie Besant's conversion, from a Fabian Socialist taken up with the cause of laboring-class women, to an active member of the Theosophical Society, is not as sudden or dis-consonant, as it seems. Her Fabian/socialist position, (and note that she was the executive member of the Fabian society along with Bernard Shaw, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and William Clarke) as propagated in the *National Reformer* dovetailed perfectly with her Theosophist position where she espoused 1) universal brotherhood without distinction of race or creed, 2), the study of Aryan literature as a culturally revivalist project, and 3) investigation of unexplained laws of universe and the latent powers of man.

Her employment of spiritual-terminology exhorting Indians to resist blind mimicry of the West, and evolve a distinct and heroic cultural identity, is a significant step in the history of Indian nationalism. Annie Besant noted : "We have resolved to revive the Ancient Indian ideals of Indian education and Indian Culture, to make Indian Ideals, the basis of Indian civilization, renouncing the hybrid and sterile ideas of anglicized -- Indianism" (Annie Besant, *Indian Ideals*, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House 1930, 38). In her Anniversary Address in Feb 1900 she expressed the hope that with the revival of spirituality alone, India could regain her greatness and enhance and grow national life.

In one of her many lecture tours in Calcutta Town Hall, Besant faced a packed assembly. She evoked huge ovation. She began by asserting that India had been created by avatars of gods and that the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas came from the mouths of those who were more than men. The newspaper *Hope* detected a mighty awakening as the educated classes began distinguishing between the solidity of the Hindu system and the hollowness of the West. The most significant comment came from Amrita Bazar Patrika known for its nationalist stance. Its editor Motilal Ghose hailed Annie Besant, as the

emancipator of India from the chains of foreign rule. (*The Times* 5th Feb. 1894, as qtd. in Anne Taylor's *Année Besant: A Biography*. Oxford: OUP, 1992, 270).

B. Theosophical Society's relation with the Indian nationalist movement has been well recorded. Initially, Theosophical Society dovetailed with the Arya Samaj in Bombay in its intentions of denouncing Christianity, and propagating indigenous Aryan culture. However, with the colonial government turning its heat upon the Society for its supposed anti-government activities, they fell out with the Arya Samajists and its leader, Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Subsequently they shifted the Theosophical Society premises from Bombay to Adyar in Chennai in 1882. In 1889, the *Pall Mall Gazette* printed an article denouncing Madame Olga Novikoff and Helena Blavatsky as Russian spies.

The theosophical Society's relations with Swami Vivekananda, and the Ramkrishna Mission Math of Kolkata, too, was a troubled one as Vivekananda often accused them of practicing primitive 'mumbo-jumbo'. Being Russian nationals, and in view of the vulnerable state of the North West Frontier, and British fears of Russian dominance, Olcott and Blavatsky found themselves perpetually under police surveillance. Sister Nivedita (Vivekananda's closet disciple) reiterated the British imperialist position when she accused the Theosophical Society to be a stalking horse of Russian plans to destabilize British control of India. Olcott's speeches were seen to be 'upsetting the natives' and subversive in intent in the sense that they were directed at common Indians, exhorting them to extol their own religious beliefs, and awaken to spiritual possibilities within themselves through practice of theosophy.

Whether or not Blavatsky was a spy, Blavatsky and Olcott seemed to team with those very people who had launched various forms of anti-colonial movements, such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati (founder of the reformist *Arya Samaj*); N. K. Ghosh, the founder of the nationalist newspaper *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and Krishnavarma Shyanji, the propagator of violent resistance against imperial rule.

- C. Reference must be made to Gandhi's engagement with the Theosophists such as Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant in London, in the early part of his life, his reading of Blavatsky's *The Key to Theosophy* (1889) and the subsequent deepening of his sympathies for a universal brotherhood of humankind irrespective of class or creed. To a great extent, Gandhi's formulation of terms such as *aparigraha* and *sarvodaya*, and his espousal of an anti-materialistic, non-possessive mindset, as well as a concern for the poorest, and the most marginal in the struggle for Indian independence, owes an ideological debt to the Theosophical teachings of Madame Blavatsky, and Annie Besant. Refer to Pyarelal Nayyar's *Mahatma Gandhi - The Early Phase, Vol. I* (1956, 240) for more on this.
16. The 'novel' was an imported genre in colonial Bengal, and its "generic skeleton", to use a Bakhtinian analogy, in the late 19th century, had not yet "hardened" (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 4). Also the angle of refraction between the genre's place of origin (England), and its place of reception (colonial Bengal) was still quite acute.
 17. Note that Annie Besant was instrumental in shifting the Theosophical Society's leanings from Buddhism to Hinduism, and was at the forefront of a Hindu revivalist movement, teaming up with Pandit Madan Mohan Malavya to institute the ultra-Hindu Benaras Hindu University in North India, in 1917.
 18. Note that the British Phrenological Society was founded in 1881 — a time defined as the high noon of Anglo-American spirit-studies.
 19. It would not be entirely out of place to mention that Jyotirindranath Tagore (son of Devendranath, and co-President of the Theosophical Society) wrote "*Adhunik Mastiskatatwa o Phrenology*" (Modern theories regarding the human brain and phrenology) as a serious, scientific essay and that the entire Tagore clan who were associated with the spiritualist society (including Swarnakumari Devi, the president of the female wing of Theosophical Society) were committed to dissemination of positivist sciences and wrote significant essays on scientific issues. Refer to Parthajit Gangopadhyay eds. *Thakurbari Bijan Bhavna* (2009) for more on this.

20. Oppenheim's summing up of the complex Darwinian/Theosophist position in this context is particularly germane : - "There was thus held out to the Theosophist the promise of unlimited evolution to a state of absolute spiritual perfection [...]. Charles Webster Leadbeater, a prominent Theosophical lecturer, former Anglican clergyman, and close friend of Annie Besant", noted that, "Man is immortal; that he is a creature who is ever evolving, and whose power and glory will in future have no limit." ("Theosophy and the Occult" *The Other World*, 168). Whereas Darwinian theory subsumed the individual in the evolution of the species, theosophy granted human beings a definite agency in the evolutionary process.
21. Refer to Tanika Sarkar's *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation* (2001) for more on this.
22. The preface to his Bengali novel *Adhyatmika* is rendered in English by Peary Chand Mitra.
23. Sarala is credited to have founded the Bharat Stree Mahamandal in 1910, the first women's organization established by a woman, in India. Refer to Ritu Sen Chaudhuri's "*Jibaner Jharapata* : Remembering Autobiography into the Nation" (*Scripting the Nation: Bengali Women's Writing, 1870s to 1860s*, *Occasional Paper* 9, Kolkata : School of Women Studies, Jadavpur University, June 2009, 43-67) for an interesting analysis of the 'feminist' position in Sarala's writings.
24. Peary Chand's books, are, linguistically speaking, peculiarly amphibious, and he inevitably 'prefaces' his Bengali narratives espousing the woman question, in English.
25. According to Ashis Nandy "the folk theory of sati" in colonial Bengal, "suggested that the husband's death was due to the wife's poor ritual performance and was her self-created fate. The theory imputed that the wife brought about the death of the man under her protection, by her weak ritual potency and by deliberately not using or failing to maintain her latent woman ability to manipulate natural events and fate. [...] All widows consequently seemed to be failures in propitiation and instances of homicidal wishes come magically true" (Nandy 'Sati', 9).

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FEAR AND BEAUTY IN TAGORE'S *NAIBEDYA*

1. Introduction

Tagore's *Naibedya*, a 1901 collection of a hundred poems that he dedicated to his father Debendranath Tagore, has never been central to debates in Tagore studies. Critics have not chosen to thematize it as an object of study, not even as evidence for salient theses prompted by other writings. Ordinary readers, however, have consistently treated individual poems and songs in *Naibedya* as canonical. Oft-quoted passages from this collection include "Tomaar pataakaa jaare daao taare bohibaare daao shakoti" 'When you choose a standard-bearer, grant him the strength to bear it' (20)¹, "Boiiraaggo-shaadhone mukti, she aamaar nay" 'The liberation that unattachment brings is not for me' (30), "He raajendro, tabo haate kaal antohin" 'King of kings, the time that you have is boundless' (39), "Shataabdir shurjo aaji raktomeghomaajhe/ asto gealo" 'The sun of the century sets, amidst clouds that tell of bloodshed' (64), "Anneay je kare aar anneay je shahe/ tabo ghrinaa jeano taare trinoshamo dahe" 'If someone does wrong and if somebody tolerates it — / May your contempt burn them both, like grass' (70), "Citto jethaa bhayshunno, neeo, jethaa shir" 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high' (72), "Eakaadhaare tumii aakaash, tumi nirx" 'You are the sky and the nest fused into one' (81).

When familiar songs are added to this list, such as "Jodi e amraaro hridayoduaaro bandho rahe go probhu" 'If the door to my heart, lord, is ever closed' (5) or "Tomaar ashime praanomono

1 All references are to poem numbers rather than page numbers.

loye” “with my heart and mind, through your infinite majesty” (14). it becomes possible to argue that this little book is second only to the *Gitanjali* trio as a source of perennial Tagore quotes. It is abundantly clear that the content of Tagore’s *Book of Consecration* has achieved permanent resonance with conceptual and moral frameworks shared by several genres of public discourse in Bengal. Surely critics need to catch up with the public on this front.

Elsewhere (Dasgupta 2011), I have provided an overall account of the entire text, arguing that it is designed as a single oeuvre. In the present intervention I propose to focus on two binaries in the text — on its treatment of *fear/courage* and of *the beautiful /the sordid* — and to contextualize this examination at the level of Tagore’s need to come to terms with the theological architecture he had inherited from his father.

2. The fear of God in Debendranath

At the outset of such a project, it is appropriate to remind ourselves that Debendranath Tagore had placed the fear of God at the heart of his understanding of the relation between God and the world in general, and between God and humankind in particular. We find his autobiography underscoring the fact that he attached supreme importance to an Upanishadic passage about the fear of God, *Kathopanishad* 2:3.3 (for the context of the passage itself, see Sen et al. 1994: 141). Debendranath writes : “He is the refuge of all, and it is under his control that the cosmic order has always functioned; in order to keep this thought in view, the following verses were then quoted : *Bhayād asyāgnis tapati, bhayāt tapati sūryaś, bhayād indraḥ ca vāyuś ca mṛtyur dhāvati pañcamah*. It is the fear of God that makes fire burn, makes the sun shine, makes the clouds float around, makes the winds blow, makes death bring life to an end” (Thaakur 1981/89: 32).

In case casual readers miss the point, he makes it again, portraying God as wielding a whip (*kashaughaat*) to ensure that

the potency of his image drives the point home: "I used to stand in excessive awe of the unlimited power of nature; but now it became absolutely clear to me that over and above nature there is a controller. [...] His whip has supreme mastery over one and all. *Bhāyat asyāgnis tapati, bhāyat tapati sūryaḥ*" (Thaakur 1981/89: 36).

The social context of nineteenth century Calcutta in which we are to place the theme of fear becomes available in the following vivid depiction. In his autobiography, Debendranath recalls the details of the first annual plenary meeting of the Tattvabodhini Sabha. I have italicized the reference to fear to draw attention to that part of the passage: "After my lecture, Shyamacharan Bhattacharya spoke, followed by Chandranath Roy, and then Umeshchandra Roy, after him Prasannachandra Ghosh, subsequently Akshaykumar Datta, and finally Ramaprasad Roy. By the time these talks were over, it was nearly midnight. After these items, Ramchandra Vidyavagish delivered a sermon, followed by music. The clock struck two. The audience were at their wit's end. Everybody had come to my house directly from work. Perhaps some of them had not been able to freshen up or even have a drink of water, and yet *the fear of offending me* prevented them from leaving before the end of the meeting [*aamaar bhaye keho shabhaa bhangger aage jaaite paariteche naa*]. Was anybody listening, did anybody follow anything, I really wonder! But the meeting ended on a splendid note" (Thaakur 1981/89: 19).

It is *such* control — of all functions of the universe — that Debendranath attributes to his God, and *this* level of fear of the controller on the part of those under his sway. We know our Tagore, and we understand that Rabindranath Tagore's sensibility could not possibly portray his God of love in terms that make such fear of authority the basis of humankind's attitude to God, even though Rabi immensely loved his father and wished to follow in his theological footsteps. What, then, was to be done? This, I shall argue here, was the question to which Tagore worked out a distinctively personal answer in the text of *Naibedya*. The fact that his father appreciated and publicized it suggests a greater ability

to recognize the need for major conceptual revision than many of us give him credit for.

3. Naibedya on the ancient Indian inheritance

Some readers may doubt the project itself. I therefore begin by noting that *Naibedya* is quite open about the issue. Poem 57 invokes the ancient Indian seers: "He shakol ishsharer parom ishshar./ tapobonorucchaaye meghomondroshshar/ ghothonaa koriyaachilo shabaar upore/ ognite, jalete, ei bishshocaraacare./ bonoshpoti-oshodhite eak debotaar/ akhandxo akkahe oikko. She baakyo udaar/ ei Bhaaroteri. ...Taaxraa eak mahaan bipul shottopathe tomaare lobhiyaachen nikhil jagote", 'God of all gods, the deep, firm voice in the glades of the meditators' forest once proclaimed the undivided, everlasting unity of a single deity over fire, over water, over all earth, from the majestic trees to the modest shrubs. That wide-open declaration came from our India. They walked the road of a great and comprehensive truth and found you ubiquitously present in the universe' (Thaakur 1978: 57).

Following up, poem 58 directly translates the *Kathopanishad* 2:3.3 passage: "Taaxhaaraa dekhiyaachen — bishshocaraacar/ jhoriche aanondo hote annondonirjhar/ ognir prottek shikhaa bhaye tabo kaaxpe./ baayur prottek shaash tomaari protaape./ tomaari aadesh bohi mrittu dinraat/ caraacar marmoriyaa kare jaataayaat" 'they saw the cosmic stream flowing from the source of all joy, they saw fire, its every flame trembling in fear of you, every breath of wind showing your power, death itself going and coming all over the world at your bidding alone.' If Tagore was not concerned with this passage, focal in his father's theology, he would not have dealt with it so directly in the *Naibedya* cycle.

What does he do to resolve his personal dilemma? One move is made in the last few lines of poem 58 itself, where Tagore fuses *fear* of God with divine *reassurance*: "Taaxhaaraa chilén nitto e bishsho-aalayel kebol tomaari *bhaye*, tomaari *nirbhaye*./ tomaari shaashongarbe diptotriptomukhe" 'they lived in this cosmic abode

exclusively in fear of you, in your reassurance, beaming, proud of being ruled by you'. But this is hardly the best starting point for our exercise. Now that recalcitrant readers are convinced that the project is worth their while, let us start at the very beginning.

4. Contexts of prayer

As a poet, Tagore has to visualize his God vividly; his depiction has to choose details of light or darkness and landscape. The very first poem of the *Naibedya* cycle brings out the importance of the time of day: is our fear of God a daytime question or a nocturnal question? Debendranath did not have contexts in mind. In Rabindranath, the context is one of the players in the game of worship. To see this, let us look at poem 1. It begins with the words "Protidin aami, he jibonshaami, daaxraabo tomaari shommukhe./ Kori jorxkar, he bhubaneshshar, daaxraabo tomaari shommukhe", 'every day, lord of my life, I will stand in your presence; with folded hands, lord of the world, I will stand in your presence'.

Stanza two changes the setting: "Tomaar apaar aakaasher tale bujone birale he./ namrohridaye nayoner jale daaxraabo tomaari shommukhe", 'I will stand in your presence under your boundless sky, alone, humbly, crying'. Now that I am face to face with the cosmos, my own emptiness becomes apparent, and elicits tears, which I then dedicate to the presence. Are tears a marker for my finiteness face to face with the infinite and responding to the vast asymmetry?

When I am not alone, stanza three implies, there is a different God involving companionship and cooperation: "Tomaar bicitro e bhadrachangshaare karmopaaraabaaro-paare he./ nikhilo-jagotojoneer moophaare daaxraabo tomaari shommukhe" 'I will stand in your presence in this massive and diverse world of yours, amidst all the people immersed in their oceanic labour'. Does the work keep me from apprehending God's infinity? Or does the multitude also

liberate me from my self-centredness? Notice, in any case, that the reference to labour in stanza three implicitly refers to the working day, and thus to daylight.

The phases of my engagement with the world punctuate a day moving towards a never quite forgotten night, as stanza four reminds me: "Tomaar e bhabhe mor kaaj jabe shamaapon habe he./ ogo raajoraaj, eakaaki nirabe daaxraabo tomaari shommukhe" 'when my work in this world of yours comes to an end, king of kings, I will stand in your presence alone, wordlessly', implying that words exchanged with others may obstruct my vision when I am too thoroughly immersed in the oceanic labour of stanza three. The night, a time of contemplation, gives me unimpeded access to the infinite.

Access, yes; but fear? Are my tears in this depiction supposed to express an anxiety akin to fear? The intricate crafting of the *Naibedya* cycle makes it necessary to postpone such queries. For the time being, we read the tears as just tears, and continue to wonder what is special about the night in the context of accessing the divine, the infinite. The reading that seems to work best has it that the light of my day leaves far too much in a grim and unyielding shadow; it is then at night that God's richer light reaches into that darkness and drives it away. The poet tells us this in poem 2: "Aamaar e ghare aaponaar kare grihodipkhaani jaalo./ Shab dukhoshok shaarthok hok lobhiyaa tomaari aalo" 'light the lamp of my home with your own hands. May my gaining your light make all my losses worthwhile.' My lamp-lighting efforts, the poet goes on to say, produce only smoke and pain; may the rays of your steady light transmute all my pain into lucidity.

Prayer, in Tagore, is not a weapon. A devotee does not target evil in others; devotion is not an enterprise that can even remotely involve frightening others. The darkness of others is for their prayers to repair, not mine. When Tagore leads my prayer, I pray for the light to chase my own darkness away; I do not pray for victory over evil located in others. I pray for a lucidity that will raise

my own fruitless efforts into an effortless grace that I cannot attain all by myself.

5. Home — and music

This is not unconnected to the locale that poem 2 specifies in its very first words: my home. In Tagore, I do not really have a home until I have learnt how to pray a real home into existence. In the argument this essay is trying to build, the home is the site at which all four of its themes resonate — the beautiful; the sordid; my initial terror in the face of the infinite; and the quiet reassurance that I am praying for, the reassurance that nurtures courage.

This home is not just a relationship with space, but with time as well. Poem 3, where watching becomes coterminous with waiting, is about how I sustain my spirituality through a daily cycle whose tiresome moments, at times verging on the sordid, keep throwing into jeopardy the constancy of my connection to the infinite. "Nishithoshayone bhebe raakhi mone ogo antorjaami" 'my inner companion, when I go to bed at night, I tell myself' is a song familiar to many of us, obviating the need to cite the entire text. Perhaps the following brief rendering of its content will do: 'at each moment I think of meeting you as an imminent joy put off for the next few hours; the evening, pushing the postponement into my night, brings finality; this is how I continually reconsecrate all that I am and do.'

Why is this portrayal of the sustainability of my prayer through the daily cycle immediately followed by a poem (4) that invokes the power of divine music in a prayer mode? 'Rule over all beauty of body and of friendship', the poet prays to the deity seen as the source of the musical, 'may all hostility surrender to your magic. I see your pure, quiet smile all over the sky; may the sight of your glory shame all narrow vanity into withdrawing.' What is the work being done by this direct reference to the sordid in connection with the music? Is it just that music is able to remind my sordid self of the potential for beauty?

Music is mentioned this early in the cycle precisely because it is through music that the poet hopes to put all the pieces together in his conception of the home as a site of consecration. Given God's universal music — so the central argument of *Naibedya* runs — the question is how to attune oneself to him. This becomes the point of poem 5, where the poet prays for the divine music to force him to listen. 'If my door is closed', he prays, 'break it down and come to my heart, do not go back, my lord.' Given our familiarity with this song, in this context we merely need to remind ourselves that the request for forced entry into his heart is reiterated, and not just in this song.

6. Cacophony, doubt and faith

Tagore then moves from the prayer mode to the viewpoint of someone who keeps failing to tune into the cosmic. Poem 6 addresses the sordid moment of personal failure. But the failures are not merely personal; the backdrop against which one is praying is a bleak world; one's devotion is a seeking, not a matter of complacently contemplating what has already been achieved. Poem 11, sounding one of the major notes of this cycle, presents a troubled world, in which it is up to us to achieve a home strong enough to nurture a sense of reality. The text is unambiguous: "Aaxdhaare aabrito ghano shangshay/ bishsho koriche graash./ taari maajhkhaane shangshayaatito/ prottay kare baash" 'an opaque fog of doubt takes the world by storm: right inside this fog lives the faith that surpasses all doubt'.

The word used for faith here, "prottay", reiterated in the second strophe, crystallizes this poem-cycle's project of building bridges between the critical labour of the intellect and the fashioning activity of the imagination — and of providing a thematic centre for the personal quest marked by the binaries of fear/ courage and beauty/ sordidness. That 'faith' in strophes one and two of poem 11 corresponds to 'peace' in strophe three and 'the permanent bliss of one's steady yoga-seat' in strophe four of this tightly structured

poem deserves close reading. The suggestion is that we are to view doubt as an unconsidered response to strophe four's "nindaa o khoti, mrittu biraho./ kato bishobaan urxe ahoraho" 'insult and injury, death and separation, these poisoned arrows assailing us constantly' -- and to contrast it with the right response, with an unflinching faith capable of retaining its composure in the face of these poisonous assaults.

7. Extending the home: faith and institutions

In Tagore, faith has to do with a capacity for serious attention. If one is not faithfully attentive, one will never acquire the stamina that sets institutions in motion and then keeps them instituted. This poem-cycle presents the home as the core institution. The faith and the capacity for attention that home must nurture are presented as the basis of institution-sponsoring inclusiveness.

Theoretically speaking, the move poem 11 makes can be construed as a core act of meta-instituting that enables institutions to be set in motion and kept going. If we choose to see the crucible of institutions as national, this becomes a moment of founding the nation. Other choices are available; Tagore was arguably committed to a supranational, civilizational reading of India, but, like Gandhi, with several reservations, allowed his oeuvre to be harnessed to the nationalist chariot, given the failure of his period to fashion other publicly usable visualizations of a civilizational construal. Now that many of us are reimagining the nation and other crucibles, it becomes likelier that these other choices will be kept in view as we go about our theoretical work.

At first sight, poem 12 seems not to contribute directly to our work. It begins by invoking a lotus: "Amalo kamolo shahoje jalero bole/ Amonde rahe phutxiyaa/ Phirite naa hay 'aalay kothaay' bole/ Dhulay dhulay lutxiyaa" 'This spotless lotus blooms in joy, in the easy embrace of the water; it doesn't need to go around wailing where is home, where is home', a refugee in the dust'. This

metaphor seems unrelated to the project of a faith that is both cognitive and affective — it seems to cleave to the affective far too closely.

But poem 12 repays closer scrutiny. Strophe two runs: “Temoni shahoje aanonde haroshito/ tomaar maajhaare rabo nimagnocitto/ pujaashatodal aapone she bikoshito/ shab shangshay txutxiyaa” ‘Blooming in such perfect joy, my consciousness will steep itself in you; my devotion is a lotus that breaks through all doubts and blossoms all by itself’. Here the affective meets the cognitive; Tagore is proposing that faith cuts the red tape of formally legitimizable doubt at the moment of declaring itself alive and well; having done so, faith proceeds to make several moves, some of them directly countering the reasoning on which the doubting imagination bases its cynical conclusions.

The first such move is made in the third strophe of poem 12: “Kothaa aacho tumi path naa khujibo kobhu./ shudhaabo naa kono pothike./ Tomaari maajhaare bhromibo phiribo. probhu./ jakhon phiribo je dike” ‘I won’t go around looking for you, or asking passers-by how to reach you. Wherever I go, lord, I come and go inside you, whichever way I move’.

This move is made repeatedly in Tagore’s oeuvre. The song “Mahaabishshe mahaakaashe mahaakaalo-maajhi. aami maanobo eakaaki bhromi bishshaxye bhromi bishshaxye” ‘in an enormous universe, under a boundless sky, amidst time without end, I, human, walk alone, in wonder’ of 1303 B.E. (1896) comes to mind in this connection. So does the passage “jaa khushi taai kori/ tobu taaxr khushitei cori” ‘we do as we wish and yet we stay within his pleasure’ from the 1317/1910 song “Aamraa shabaai raajaa aamaader ei raajaar raajotte” ‘we are all kings in the realm of this king of ours’.

8. The conceptual basis of sovereignty

The basis for Tagore’s theory of sovereignty, presented in this quintessentially Tagorean formulation reiterated throughout his work,

is to be read with the hermeneutic-circular core of *Naibedya*'s argument — the core presented in poem 16, which begins with the words "Bhakto koriche probhur carone / jibonshamorpon - / Ore din, tui jorxkar / kar taahaa daroshon". 'The devotee, prostrate at the lord's feet, dedicates his life to his lord — fold your hands and look at this, you in your poverty'.

What strikes the reader is the object of beholding in this portrayal. Tagore asks you to behold the beholding that lies at the heart of devotion. 'You' are being exhorted, 'in your poverty', to 'look at' — to direct your devotional 'darshan' gaze towards the ideal devotee who, 'prostrate at his lord's feet, dedicates his life to his lord'.

The ideal devotee's self-dedication involves beholding his lord with a pure gaze. You are enjoined to gaze at that gazing and thereby to stage a drama in which that prototypical gazer-figure, on your behalf, does the pure and steady seeing that the resources of your poor self do not permit you to stay connected to at all times.

Consecration involves seeing this pure seeing. By reaching out to your image of the iconic devotee, you enable yourself to take part in the purity of that gaze. That the injunction addresses 'you in your poverty', "ore din", is both a description of the sordid in your quotidian existence and an exhortation to empty yourself, to embrace inner austerity, on your way to gazing at the pure gaze.

That Tagore is indeed enjoining you to take part in the ideal devotee's worship becomes explicit in the third strophe. But we need to move slowly. Stanza two reads: "Milaner dhaaraa porxeche jhori, / bohilyaa jeteche amritolahori, / bhutale maathaaxi taakhilyaa laho re/ shubhaashish-borishon", 'this torrential downpour of communion,/ these waves of delight roaring past you,/ put put your head on the ground, and take the shower of benediction'.

In the third strophe, the participation motif becomes explicit: "O jee jalok porxeche taaxhaar udaar lalaatxdeshe/ Shethaa hote taari

ekti roshshix porxuk maathaay eshe", 'the sun shines on his all-encompassing forehead./ may just one ray of that light bathe your head'.

This image is to be read with care — the honorific "taaxhaar" 'his' refers to the lord's forehead, not the devotee's — and in a context specified further in stanza four: "Caari dike taaxr shaantishaagor/ sthir hoye aache bhoi caraacar./ khanokaal-tare daaxrxao re tire./ shaanto karo re mon" 'wherever you look, his ocean of peace./ quiet and steady, fills up all space./ just stand for a while on its shore./ put your mind at rest'.

In other words you are being enjoined, clearly and unambiguously to take part in the peace that passes all understanding by *finitely* participating in the iconic devotee's *infinite* participation. Hence the 'just one ray of that light'; hence the 'stand for a while on its shore'. This injunction depicts the task in terms of participating in a participation.

Readers familiar with philosophical commentary on how language carries meaning will recognize this circular format as the hermeneutic circle, made formally precise in recent decades by philosophers of language such as Grice.

Immediately after poem 16, Tagore elaborates, over several poems, the point that I must practise the unusual art of letting go of my ordinary human courage in order to accept your divine invitation to risk my all in a far more daring adventure. This sounds paradoxical — and initially does not sound particularly courageous — but involves the same courage that one finds in the familiar proposal, not confined to Tagore alone, that true devotees must trade personal pride for participation in the majesty of the divine. In poem 22 Tagore articulates that abstraction itself as a general move to which I wish to draw your theoretical attention, for it inflects the theme of courage in terms of a method of abstraction that enables devotees to mediate their way into a trans-contextual perspective without losing sight of their concrete context itself.

Poem 22 opens in a busy urban setting: "Moddhaanhe nagoro maajhe path hote pathe/ karmobonnaa dhaay jabe uecholito srote"

'on a sultry afternoon, the stream of urban labour rushes from street to street'.

In these busy surroundings, the poet performs an act of abstraction and hears the inner silence at the heart of it all: "takhon shaboshaa heri mudiyaa nayan--/ mahaajanaaronno-maajhe anonto nirjon/ tomaar aashonkhaani -- kolaahal-maajhe/ tomaar nishshabdo shabhaa nistabdhe biraaje" 'then I shut my eyes and suddenly see the infinitely solitary place where you are sitting, right in the middle of this multitude -- I see how your quiet assembly wordlessly rules over this noisy crowd.'

This is a specific stilling of the noise that the poet is asking us to visualize — a move that belongs to the genre of abstraction but does not quite replicate any philosophical move we have learnt how to make in other theoretical contexts. If we can listen to God listening to it all, we can ourselves be still in a finite replication of his infinite stillness. Note the way this move parallels poem 16's proposal that we should behold the iconic devotee's beholding.

9. From abstraction to the landscape

Turning from the bustle of the city to the surface stillness of nature, poem 23 extends the move to the natural realm: "Aaji hemonter shaanti beapto caraacare" 'the peace of late autumn pervades the world today', "ei stabdhotaay/ shunitechi trine trine dhulaay dhulaay/ mor angge rome rome, loka lokaantare/ grohe shurje taarokaay nittokaal dhore/ onuparomaanuder nrittokalorol— / tomaar aashon gheri anonto kallol" 'in this peace and quiet I can hear, from the leaves of grass to the specks of dust, all over the planets and the suns, through all eternity, the molecules and atoms dancing away — this ceaseless torrent around your silent seat'.

That the romantic poet Tagore, known for his many and diverse portrayals of nature as a site of beauty, should place nature in poem 23 under such a lens of abstraction is a bit of a surprise. It becomes

appropriate to stop in our tracks and take a closer look at the portraying that is going on in this cycle.

In *Naibedya*, Tagore places the devotee face to face with God. Landscapes move in and out of the frame depending on the inflections in his argument. For instance, poem 79, in a direct theoretical mode, articulates the question of how one is to embody, in one's flesh, blood and mind, the classical Indian insight that God is "putro hote priyo/ bitto hote priyotaro, jaa-kichu aaxittiyo/ shab hote priyotamo" 'dearer than one's son/ more valuable than one's money, more intimate than one's kin'. In poem 80, the poet considers one strategy that may achieve this — opening one's window to cosmic infinity: "cittobaataayono mamō/ she agommo acinter paane raatridin/ raakhibo unmukto kori he antobihin" 'endless one, I will keep the window of my mind open at all times to what is beyond reach, beyond thought'.

To 'what' is beyond reach, did I say? 'What' and 'who' are tricky pronouns when one is visualizing the infinite, as some philosophers have been noting with great clarity in recent decades. Poem 81 is a frequently cited poem that points up this question, addressing God as 'beautiful', "He shundar", and explicitly saying that the beautiful is both a who and a where: "Eakaadhaare tumii aakaash, tumi nirx" 'you are nest and sky rolled into one'. We now understand slightly more clear the fact that poem 23 presents the natural landscape but does not exactly sing about it. Depending on whether a particular point in the argument needs to stress the infinity of nature instead of the cosy, finite access we have to this infinity, Tagore's portrayal of nature chooses different coordinate systems and correspondingly varies its aesthetics.

To return to the theoretical argument that *Naibedya* articulates as explicitly as the verse form will permit, poem 82, which develops the thought that the nest provides warmth and sweetness while the sky is vast, says I must resist getting trapped in this warmth: "tobu shudhu maadhurjo-maajhaare/ caahi naa nimagno kore raakhite hriday" 'yet I don't want to remain immersed in this sweetness'. "Aamaar otit tumi jethaa shikhaane/ antoraaxttaa dhaay nitto anonter

txaane" 'where you are far beyond me, there my heart of hearts, attracted by the eternal and the infinite, wants to take me'. To lose that impulse would impoverish me: "Tomaar maadhurjo jeano bexdhe naahi raakhe/ tabo oishshorjer paane txaane she aamaake" 'may your warmth not tie me down, may it propel me towards your abundant riches'.

This motif touches base with India's ancient inheritance in poem 83, which invokes the Upanishadic verse 'he is far and he is near': "He dur hoite dur, he nikatxotamo./ jethaay nikatxe tumi shethaa tumi mamoo/ jethaay shudure tumi shethaa aami tabo" 'you who are the most distant and the most intimate, where you are close to me you are mine, and where you are remote I am yours'. This poem explores the polarity of work and peace and concludes: "Kaache tumi karmotatx aaxtatotxinir/ dure tumi shaantishindhu anonto gobhir" 'near me, you are the labour-laden banks of the river of my soul; far away, you are the vast and deep ocean of peace'.

10. Beauty, the sordid and love

Just what does poem 84 say as it brings this framework to bear on the task of resisting the sordid pettiness of the normal, conflictual coexistence of egos? "Mukto karo, mukto karo nindaaproshongshaar/ dushcheddo srinkhal hote" 'release me, release me from the ineluctable chains of praise and blame'. Could it be that a balancing act —balancing the small, capable of pettiness but also of warmth, against the large, a scale that is capable of mindless aggregation but also of the distinctive beauty of depth and majesty can in fact keep me in touch with the peace that passeth understanding while I deal with the everyday world of love and labour? If it can, then the project of *nibedon*/*Naibedya*/consecration will strengthen my *prottay*, my faith, to the point of turning my home into the site of a meaningful and active quest, a site where I come to terms, at last, with the beautiful and the sordid, with fear and faith.

But questions arise about this 'faith' that he seeks. Tagore is aware that his typical reader associates faith with the privacy of asceticism. The point that liberation cannot be attained through an individual exercise of detachment and asceticism is forcefully made in poem 32: God commends the devotee poet for having kept all his doors open. What does this mean?

One mode of keeping doors open that *Naibedya* explores is love — and this is where Tagore clearly adds to the repertory his father had taught him to regard as the core of the Indian inheritance. Poem 42 declares that love is all about finding one's divine and hidden beloved, and paying infinite and unsolicited homage: "Shei to premer garbo, bhoktir gourab" 'this is what love is proud of, this is devotion's glory'; "tumi caao naai pujaa, she caahe pujite" 'you did not want to be worshipped, love wants to worship you'. Love takes pride in finding you who are the hidden God: "binaa aadeshche pujaa, he goponocaari./ binaa aaovaaner khoj — shei garbo taari" 'worshipping without being told to, my underground lord, embarking on an unprompted quest — this is what love is proud of'.

Given a God who does not order me to worship him, who would not dream of punishing me if I ignore him, who in fact hides himself in order to test my love, it makes sense for a lover to go to any length to overcome obstacles, subterfuges, concealments, to find his divine beloved. Tagore's take on the love of God is one aspect of the anti-authoritarian theology that underlies his democratic socio-political vision. Later in the cycle, from poem 85 onwards, Tagore looks at the rhythm of the seasons in nature, and ups and downs in human fortune, as a cosmic beat that my heart has to dance with, in order for my love to become big enough to participate in the vast range of God's playfulness.

If my love is to have both enough amplitude to participate in God's infinite playfulness, and enough specificity to keep my significant human others in view, what kind of emotional prestidigitation must I put myself through?

The answer, I suggest, is closely connected to the fundamental problem Tagore sets out to solve in the book of consecration — that of reconciling his own democratic, anti-authoritarian convictions with the 'fear of God' motif he inherits from Debendranath.

11. Tagore's solution

The central move of Tagore's solution appears in poem 51: "He raajendro, tomaa-kaache nato hote gele/ je urdhe utxhite hay shethaa baahu mele/ laho dxaaki shudurgam bondhur kotxhin/ shoilopathe — agroshar karo protidin/ je mahaan pathe bato baroputrogon/ giyaachen pathe pathe koriyaa arjon/ maron-odhik dukkho" 'my great king, for me to bow to you, I must first reach those heights; reach out and call me to the quest that takes me up those rocky paths that once served our rugged pioneers, your favourite sons of old; their sufferings, more intense than death itself, took them up those mountains, may I followe in their footsteps.'

This praise of the authentic seers of ancient India is immediately followed by direct censure of today's would-be custodians of that treasure. "tomaare khealnaa kori koriyaache khealaa—/ karmere koreche ponggu nirartho aacaare,/ geanere koreche hato shaastrokaaraagaare" 'they have played with you as if you were a toy — they have parodied sacred action with their impotent, meaningless rituals, they have slaughtered the intellect and thrown the pieces into the prison of their commentarial scriptures'.

This is the point at which the *Naibedya* cycle begins the serious labour of constructing its theoretical core. Poem 53 opens with "Tumi sharbaasray e ki shudhu shunnokathaa?/ Bhay — shudhu tomaa 'pare bishshaashhinotaa/ he raajon!'" 'That you give shelter to all — are these empty words? Only those who don't believe in you, my lord, find it possible to fear at all!' Here Tagore specifies a crucial link in the chain of his argument: the link between courage and belief in his notion of confidence or faith, *prottay*.

Poem 53 articulates this point in relation to specific types of fear listed in poem 48 ('*lokobhay, raajobhay, mritubhay*') 'fear of men, fear of kings, fear of death'). Poem 45 goes on to add that, apart from not fearing men or their institutions, I must also take seriously the human rights you have given me — it is my duty to defend these rights. "*Aamaare srijon kori je mahaashammaan/ diyecho aapon haste, rohite paraan/ taar apomaan jeano shojjho naahi kori... Mor monushshotto she je tomaari protimaa... maheshshar!*" 'as long as I live, I must not allow any attacks on the great honour that you have given me with your own hands by creating me... my humanity is your image... great lord!'

My duty to punish every violation takes priority over everything else: "*hok-naa she mahaaraaj bishshomohitale/ taare jeno dandxo dii debodrohi bole/ sharboshokti loye mor*" 'even if [the violator of my rights] is an emperor on this earth, may I punish him for his crimes against God with all my strength'.

In order to be worthy of the privilege of having human rights and being obliged to defend them, I must, poem 55 states, safeguard the purity of my mind and my heart: "*Cirodin/ gean jeano thaake mukto srinkhalbihin./ Bhokti jeano bhaye naahi hay padaanato/ prithibir kaaro kaache*" 'May my intellect always remain open and unchained. May my devotion never surrender to fear of anyone in the world.'

Why must I be vigilant on this front? Because we often let falsehood take over. Poem 56 lists the types of falsity that we in contemporary India have allowed to grow, and concludes: "*Aponmaane-natoshir bhaye-bhito jon/ mitthaare chharxiyaa deay tabo shinghaashon*" 'one who is frightened, cowed down by humiliation, allows falsehood to usurp your throne'.

Tagore declares that we in India have the right to claim special access to you — we found you first. It is at this point in the cycle that poems 57 and 58, discussed in section 3, comment on fear and reassurance in an Upanishadic vein, citing the *Kathopanishad* passage that Debendranath regarded as central to the ancient teaching.

What contextualizes Tagore's diagnosis of our contemporary pathology (in terms of mindless chanting and false repetition, fearful and impurity) is his take on love. Such a reading enables us to conclude that "the quest that takes me up those rocky paths that once served our rugged pioneers, your favourite sons of old" (poem 51, discussed above) takes the form — valid in our present which can only be true to itself by avoiding mindless mimicry of the external forms of the past — of reaching out, in love, to the divine and to the human. This love is then what attunes us to the universal music through which God sends his benison and washes away all that is sordid in our lives.

On this view, Tagore's answer in *Naibedya* to section 10's question "If my love is to have both enough amplitude to participate in God's infinite playfulness and enough specificity to keep my significant human others in view, what kind of emotional prestidigitation must I put myself through?" is as follows. When I love others as fellow finite players in the infinite game of courageously facing and overcoming our own petty, blind self-love, our own inclination towards hostile, uncaring, non-accountable, intellectually and morally lazy authoritarian methods, I join all my fellow mortals in the democratic duty of constituting truly sovereign nations, and I keep particular fellow mortals in view as those significant others with whom I am intimately linked in bonds of affectionate admiration-and-scrutiny. These intimate partners and I trust each other to live up to these high standards, and consequently we are able to playfully doubt each other's courage as if it was a mere game — when in fact we realize that it is playful and majestic at the same time precisely because it is indeed a mode of taking part in God's own game.

This conceptual architecture in Tagore's solution resonates with the image of the *ghar*, the home, which I pray into reality. My home embodies my quest for balance between having to respond to the vast and the deep and needing to keep remodulating the intricate rhythms of my personal dance — a continual remodulation simultaneously focused on the authenticity that only manual labour

can underwrite and on attunement to the cosmic music through love. In my home I resist the gravitational pull of the petty and the sordid -- which, left unmodified, would cacophonically drag me down to the level of wanting to frighten others and imposing my whims on them. The prayer that keeps my home alive and true to my faith attunes me to the beautiful -- in every loving, I reaffirm beauty. This is what gives me the strength to stand up to those who violate my rights and the rights of people I love, the strength to defend the God of love against these oppressive and cacophonic enemies.

12. Other geometries of fear, love, beauty

More needs to be said to place Tagore's themes in a larger comparative space, going beyond his engagement with his father's legacy. That Tagore's explorations of love are rooted in India's mediaeval inheritance is obvious and well-known; much has been written about this. What may intrigue some readers is the contrast with other configurations of these themes. Consider the way love and terror are mentioned in the same breath by Milton (2003: 198):

She fair, divinely fair, fit love for gods,
Not terrible, though terror be in love,
And beauty, not approached by stronger hate (*Paradise Lost*
IX: 489-91).

The commentator's notes on these lines quote a Biblical passage: "You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners" (*Song of Solomon* 6:4). The obvious implication is that love enthralls me, makes a slave of me, and that it is the limitless power of my beloved that can be terrifying. The Biblical passage implies that the power of the beloved is rooted in beauty itself, which is perfect, therefore divine, therefore to be feared, for what we make, with our human hands, is never perfect, but always remind us of our frailty, our failures, the sordid

sentiments that keep pulling us away from perfection. The geometry of these themes will become more clearly visible only if through the labour of explorers.

One poet who has, at the thematic level, done some of the necessary exploring is Rilke. The first of his *Duino Elegies* begins by exclaiming: "Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic/ orders? And even if one of them suddenly / pressed me against his heart, I should fade in the strength of his/ stronger existence. For Beauty's nothing/ but beginning of Terror we're still just able to bear, / and why we adore it so is because it serenely/ disdains to destroy us. Each single angel is terrible" (Rilke 1957: 245). Here again, beauty's power, wedded to perfection, is seen in terms of being able to destroy, and "serenely disdain[ing] to destroy us." While Rilke's geometry is markedly distinct from the Biblical and Miltonian passages, we do notice a certain family resemblance. Was there nothing like this in the mediaeval Indian love poetry that the young Tagore steeped himself in? Does a demonstration that Tagore made a choice -- that it is specifically *his* thematic geometry that decouples power from destruction and associates beauty with a higher, gentler power --- lie beyond the resources of literary historical inquiry?

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BOOK REVIEW

E. V. Ramakrishnan, *Locating Indian Literature: Texts, Traditions, Translations* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2011); pp. xii + 215; price not stated

In the eighties of the last century, two great Indian scholars expressed more-or-less diametrically opposed views on what constitutes that rather elusive entity, "Indian literature". In his 1981 essay, *Some Positions on a Literary History of India*, Sujit Mukherjee, stated that despite the many languages and modes of expression, not to speak of the vast, and interrupted, time-scales, of writings (and oratures) in the many Indian languages, there was, and is, something called "Indian literature", in the singular, just as there is something called Indian music, in the singular. "Just as voices or instruments may differ but Indian music retains its identity, similarly the languages may differ but need not disrupt the entity that is Indian literature." (Mukherjee 1981: 53).

In sharp contrast, A. K. Ramanujan declared, "The official Indian literary academy, the Sahitya Akademi, has the motto, 'Indian literature is one but [sic] written in many languages'. I, for one, would prefer the plural, 'Indian literatures', and would wonder if something would remain the same if it is written in several languages, knowing as I do that even in the same language, 'a change of style is a change of subject,' as Wallace Stevens would say." (Ramanujan 1999: 7).

The great strength of E. V. Ramakrishnan's *Locating Indian Literature: Texts, Traditions, Translations*, lies in the fact that while it acknowledges the truth, repeatedly stressed by Ramanujan in his

writings, that the critic ought never to lose sight of the "context, the frame", of a text ("No Indian text comes without a context, a frame, till the nineteenth century" Ramanujan 1999: 41), it nevertheless reaches out to try and formulate a recognizably "Indian literature", albeit one which is still in the process of formation. Thus Ramakrishnan does not hesitate to move between the singular "Indian literature" and its plural form, often within the same sentence, nor is it insignificant that the subtitle of his book on Indian literature (in the singular) uses the plural forms of *text*, *tradition* and *translation*.

For Ramakrishnan, "Since essentialist positions on 'Indian' and 'literature' can no more be held with conviction, we need to conceive 'Indian literature' as a translational and dialogic domain where texts are in turmoil and traditions routinely ransacked and remade." (vii-viii) This prefatory statement is then developed in the rest of the book, which is divided into three sections dealing, respectively, with Indian literature, Malayalam literature and translation. These three sections are not, however, watertight compartments, separated from each other by virtue of their subject matter --- they move frequently between the three components of Ramakrishnan's study, that is, texts, traditions and translations. Thus, for example, in the chapter "Grounds of Comparison: The Crisis in Comparative Indian Literature", which occurs in the first section of the book, "From Mainstream to Margins: Provincialising 'Indian Literature'", Ramakrishnan moves from a discussion of the drawbacks of the orientalist/essentialist/mystical, the 'unity in diversity/nationalist and the multilingual/translationalist modes of trying to construct an Indian literature, to a consideration of oppositional traditions within regional literatures before illustrating his thesis (that "the very grounds of comparison need to be redefined" and comparative literary studies should draw upon "insights from other disciplines that help theories relationships between orality and print, social stratification and literature.... the emergence of the public sphere and the constitution of the literary in the colonial context"; 30) by examining the translations of two novels, one each in Hindi and Malayalam.

Similarly, in the chapter, "Translation as Literary Criticism: Text and Subtext in Literary Translation", which occurs in the third section of the book, "The Word in the World: Subtexts in Literary Translation", the same Malayalam novel, O. V. Vijayan's *Khasakkinte itihāsam* and its translation into English as *The Legends of Khasak* by the author himself are examined as part of a larger discussion of translations in the context of Malayalam literature and a more general consideration of the critical function of translation, or, perhaps it would be better to say, the relationship between the function of criticism and the function of translation.

Khasakkinte itihāsam also makes an appearance in the section "Refiguring Region and Resistance: Some Contexts from Malayalam Literature" in Ramakrishnan's chapter on "Literature, Society, Ideology: Perspectives on Malayalam Literature of the Twentieth Century", this time not as to-be-translated text but as "the modernist breakthrough that changed the idiom of the Malayalam novel". (84)

The occurrence of the same novel in three different contexts is an instance of the intertextuality that is one of the pleasures of Ramakrishnan's book. In his subtle and nuanced readings of texts, contexts, traditions and translations, Ramakrishnan makes many important points about the need to respect the local while not losing sight of the larger, Indian, perspective. The concluding chapter of his book, "Translating Indian Poetry into English" postulates the birth of a new genre within Indian English literature, that of the translated poetic text, a genre moreover that has "the creative potential to radicalise and reorient the basic material and manner of Indian English poetry". (203)

This is a volume that began life as discrete essays written over the course of a decade, but in revising and rewriting them Ramakrishnan has created a work that is both a marvellous example of committed, scholarly, engaging literary exegesis as well as a call to action. Unlike many other books which started out as individual essays, Ramakrishnan has taken pains to ensure that arguments and examples are not repeated in *Locating Indian Literature*. If anything, his work errs on the side of brevity and in several instances, he

is obviously hoping that other scholars will extend the areas he has demarcated for investigation (Dalit autobiographies, the role of the literary in modern Indian society, conflicting strands within regional literatures, the relationship of literature to colonialism in the Indian context, to name a few).

Irrespective of whether one believes there is *an* Indian literature or not, *Locating Indian Literature* is a work that is engaging, thought-provoking, occasionally polemical and often challenging, and ought to be essential reading for anyone interested in the study of literature in the Indian context. E. V. Ramakrishnan may not have given us the exact location of Indian literature and told us everything about the nature of the beast, but he has certainly provided us with maps and many interesting directions to set out on the hunt.

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BOOK REVIEW

Popati Hiranandani, *The Pages of My Life: Autobiography and Selected Stories*; translated by Jyoti Panjwani (New Delhi: OUP, 2010); pp. 179; Rs. 495

The Pages of My Life makes for an important contribution to fill in a few blank spaces left out by history. The autobiography of a Sindhi Hindu woman in Sindhi, made accessible to readers comfortable with English by Jyoti Panjwani, is a valuable piece of life and literature especially because it relates to a community not only uprooted but also ignored largely by history. The Sindhi community suffered the Partition just as the Bengali and the Punjabi did but the Sindhi Hindus among the various afflicted communities were the only ones rendered landless. This landlessness has become a threat to its identity. The community's lack of space in history is a direct result of its being landless; a concern which reverberates throughout *The Pages of My Life* as in the selected stories.

The subtle erosion of the culture, norms and values of the landless and dispersed Sindhis in India forms the consistent undercurrent of the narration. Hiranandani's nostalgic rendering of memories of her life in Sindh come across as touching moments reverberating in the heart of many an uprooted Sindhi; these also form precious data for any first generation Sindhi born in India seeking a link to her/his lost roots. The summer and the winter in Sindh, the variety of Sindhi cuisine-lotus stems, sweet vermicelli with spicy potatoes, etc. are missed because they are all gone forever; where a rooted community can take its weather, food for granted the Sindhi Hindus can only feel the pain of loss. This feeling of loss is also seen in Hiranandani's description of the games involving riddles, poems, etcetera that she played with her cousins

in Sindh. A noticeably significant feature of these games, as of life in Sindh, is the songs that accompany them. Every occasion in Sindh had its songs; songs were sung in Sindh routinely perhaps as the mark of celebration of every moment in life- a lesson learnt the hard way in a life marked by conquest after conquest. The Father singing a devotional song (20) or Granny singing folk songs (57) or again in the autobiographical story 'My Granny', 159-160) or Sadhu Vaswani singing (21) just as the Mother too sings (58) are lost aspects of the Sindhi way of life in present day India. Professor Bharvani listens to Sindhi songs after Partition (54) but he too is on the path of decadence like a leaf torn apart from its nurturing tree. The custom of the Sindhi Bhagati, destroyed by the Partition, also highlights singing in the Sindhi way of life (35-36). Another important feature of the Sindhis, the liberal mindedness in matters of faith, is seen in the ways of Hiranandani's mother. She insists that the children participate in Sadhu Vaswani's prayer service but also visit the gurudwara. Sadhu Vaswani, an important Hindu saint to the Sindhis, includes the Katha Upanishad, the lives of Sikh saints, the Jajji Sahib (from the Guru Granth Sahib), the Gita, verses from the Bible, the Quran and "the newest religion, Bahai Allah" (p. 20) in his discourses. Few other communities could boast of such liberalism which thanks to politicization of religion is almost extinct today.

The landlessness of the uprooted Sindhi Hindus has also resulted in lack of space for an individual to blossom as seen in the relationship of Hiranandani with people around her after Partition. In Sindh, where she receives motivation and encouragement from people, in India even her own uncle rudely asks her to refuse a job only because he is in the same institute (53). He sees her as a threat to his space. Her work with the various associations and bodies to help 'Sindhayat' or Sindhihood prosper ends impacted by the greed and apathy of the other members. Hiranandani also details the failure in her attempts at preserving Sindhi theatre in Bombay, where she lives like a transplant. It is equally disturbing to see the "thousands of Firdausis who have not been recognized among us Sindhis" (94). Her question, "why ... there aren't any Sindhi poetesses..." among others (83), is an expression of her genuine concern for the voicelessness of the Sindhi Hindu community

in India. These discouraging incidents in the writer's life lead one to ask — is this lack of encouragement and support, necessary for the younger generation of a community to blossom, the result of an acute insecurity afflicting the elders due to landless lack of space? Can literature or any art for that matter flourish as identity-markers of a landless community?

The Sindhianness in the autobiography and the stories is seen in many other instances. Hiranandani's father's death, for example, where he says to his children, "Now both of you must leave, or else, my breath will not leave me!" (6), is a calm acceptance of death sure to remind many Sindhis of some elder in the family who foretold his/her death. The chiseled features of Sindhi girls are also drawn at many places in the book; the picture of the Granny in the autobiographical story 'My Granny' deserves special mention here. The Granny is an epitome of everything the Sindhi woman stands for. Hiranandani lovingly describes the ornaments worn by the Granny. Most important ones among these are the ivory-bracelets "stretching right upto the shoulders" (158). These bangles, an important identity-marker of a married Sindhi woman, can be traced to the picture of the 'dancing girl' found in the Indus Valley excavations. Most Sindhi Hindus born in India are ignorant of this link to their roots which go deep. The Granny also makes a significant remark when she says, "...poetry is the work of poets who are seers." (159). The Granny is obviously referring to the Sufis and Saints of Sindh, whose songs have contributed most significant volumes to Sindhi literature. The Granny's saying, "...a corpse needs to be buried in the same dust from which it has sprung." (161), is an echo of Shah Abdul Latif's verse on the love of one's land. Guno in the story 'Longing Hearts' echoes the same emotions when he says, "How can anyone gauge the pain of separation we suffered on leaving our birthplace?" (163). His meeting with Tajoo is further testimony of the fact that the commoners, irrespective of their religious beliefs, bond well; it is only politicization of relations that creates divisions.

Hiranandani is at her best in expressing the nostalgic moments of her life in Sindh - for example, the joyride on the horse-carriage in Hyderabad (82); yet it is not just the Sindhianness of the incidents but the Indianness of her experiences that enhances the

narrative. *The Pages of My Life* is the journey of an Indian woman who is a Sindhi and one who has chosen to remain single. Her feminist concerns, dealt with exhaustively by Jyoti Panjwani in the introduction, could be the concerns of any woman in the Indian context. Her stories centering round rebellious women can find parallels in women's writings across the multiple state borders in India, as pointed out in the introduction. It must however be mentioned that Popati Hiranandani's feminist anger appears to close her to experiences that Amrita Pritam's openness to life led her to experience.

The flow of the language in the translation is credibly maintained throughout by Jyoti Panjwani. The carefully thought out translations of words and phrases, which a transliteration could have rendered meaningless, make the reading commendable.

Panjwani's introduction to the autobiography as also to the stories provides aptly what she herself states, a personalized framework (99). The introduction provides the necessary framework for readers to perceive the Sindhi situation in the historical backdrop of the Partition. However, it is vital from the perspective of a deeper history and socio-cultural understanding of any community that the sources referred to in their construction be first-hand. Where the introduction helps dispel the myth of Partition being peaceful-without violence and rioting — for the Sindhis, it also perpetuates certain myths. Certain statements referring to all eleven hundred years of the Arab, Mughal rule being a threat to Hinduism or there being no Sudras in the Sindhi Hindu society or the Sindhi Hindus having given up all links to its Sufi culture on the Indian side of the borders need to be taken with a pinch of salt. The experiences of Sindhi Hindus when forced to flee the land of their birth expressed by Mira Advani and Santosh Panjwani included in the introduction make for interesting reading. The gathering of more such narratives can be an important pursuit.

On the whole, Popati Hiranandani's autobiography translated by Jyoti Panjwani as *The Pages of My Life and Selected Stories* is a valuable contribution to Partition literature in English. The journey of a Sindhi and a woman, it has added to the feeble Sindhi voice in Partition literature. A must read for all those sensitive to life, pain and loss!